The London School of Economics and Political Science

State and frontier. *Historical ethnography of a road in the Putumayo region of Colombia.*

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

This dissertation is concerned with a road in the Colombian region of Putumayo. The history of this road spans from the mid nineteenth century up to the present, and encompasses a wide range of characters and events, from nineteenth and twentieth century statesmen and missionaries' ambitious colonization projects to ongoing peasant land conflicts regarding the road's future. Together, these characters and events could be conceived or read as many different fragments and voices, past and present, of the same story. My main aim, however, is not to *assemble* these voices and fragments into a single narrative of the road, as much as to *place* them in the broader historical geography of state and frontier. I focus primarily on the multiple dialectical entanglements, conflicts, and encounters through which the state and the frontier have been discursively and materially constructed in this specific region. In doing so, I will argue that this historical geography of state and frontier has been primarily shaped by a relation of "inclusive exclusion", or a relation where the assimilation or incorporation of the frontier to the spatial and political order of the state has historically depended on its exclusion from the imaginary order of the nation. Through a historical and ethnographical approach to the road, I emphasize the rhetorical and physical violence embedded in this relation, as well as the everyday practices through which this relation has been challenged and subverted in time and through space.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation was carried out between October 2008 and September 2012. During this period, I benefited from the support of several persons and institutions in the UK, Colombia, and the United States. In the LSE, I would like to thank my supervisors, Drs. Sharad Chari and Gareth Jones, who provided continuous guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the process. To my PhD colleagues and friends Joana Setzer, Antonis Vradis, Cristina Inclán-Valdez, Edyta Materka, and Carlos Andrés Brando, for their friendship and valuable company in the different stages of the research. And to the LSE, which provided the main funding for the PhD through a three-year PhD scholarship, in addition to studentships and financial support to attend various international conferences.

Between September and December 2009, after having drafted the research proposal, I carried out an academic exchange at the Department of Anthropology of Columbia University in New York, with the support of the LSE Global Public Policy Network. During that period, I was fortunate to have the guidance and support of Michael Taussig, who offered generous advice and also introduced me to Timothy Mitchell and Richard Kernaghan, both of whom provided useful insights and bibliographical suggestions for my project. I would also like to thank my friends Bret Ericson, Nicolás Cárdenas, and Orlando Trujillo, who made my stay in New York enjoyable.

Upon leaving New York, I returned to the UK for a few months to prepare for fieldwork and discuss my research progress with supervisors and colleagues in the LSE Geography Department's PhD seminars. During this time, I spent a month in Barcelona doing archival research in the Provincial Archive of the Capuchins of Catalonia. I want to thank Fra Valentí Serra, who granted me access to the documents related to the Putumayo Mission, which were particularly useful in reconstructing the history of the road. In Barcelona, I would also like to thank my friends Santiago Colmenares and Lina González for their great hospitality. The archive work in Barcelona was complemented by various weeks of research in the National Library and the Archivo General de la Nación in Bogotá, carried out with the help of María Elisa Balén and Joaquín Uribe. Both the research in the Archivo General de la Nación and an initial month of fieldwork in Putumayo (August 2009), where possible thanks to the support of the University of London Central Research Fund Grant, and the Abbey/Grupo Santander Travel Research Fund.

The main fieldwork was conducted in Putumayo between April and December 2010, and was funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation PhD dissertation fieldwork grant. During this time and on subsequent trips in 2011 and 2012, a great number of people contributed to my research in many different ways. To all of them, including those whom I may forget to mention here, I would like to express my deep gratitude and indebtedness. To my friends Juan Pablo Torres, Sebastián Chaves, Andrés Garay, Thomas Martois and Catalina Holguín, who travelled to the Putumayo and accompanied me through different stages of fieldwork. In Mocoa, I am very thankful to Adriana and José Luis Guzmán, Edgar Torres, Rocío Ortíz, Bernardo Pérez and Gladys Bernal, and Jarol and Silvana Castro, for their friendship and constant support; to the ACT team (Javier Ortíz, Adriana Vargas, Juan Mujuy, Omar, Egidio, and Lina María Hurtado), who greatly

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In Putumayo, I owe special thanks to the people with whom I did ethnographic work for sharing their time, life-stories and friendship. To the displaced community of Guaduales and its leaders Rigoberto Chito, Elvano Camacho, Javier Uribe, who patiently introduced me to Guaduales' history and struggle for resettlement; and especially to Doña Ruth, the first person I met in Guaduales and who became a great friend during and after my time in the Putumayo. To the people of the vereda Campucana, especially to María Cerón, Marino Rosero, and Humberto Tovar, who provided invaluable knowledge of the complex land practices and conflicts surrounding the road project. My deepest gratitude in Campucana, however, goes to Don Hernando Córdoba and his family, who welcomed me to their home as a member of the family and enthusiastically shared their knowledge and love of the land. Lastly, to the inhabitants, workers and daily users of the road who shared their stories and long-term relationship with this infamous infrastructure: Humberto Toro, Chepe, Gamalier Eraso, Tomás Montenegro, Maria Luisa Cárdenas, "Malacate", Laureano Cusí and Laureano Solarte, among others.

The writing of the dissertation took place in Bogotá and extended for 27 months, between June 2011 and September 2013. This was a very demanding and time-consuming task, to which I could devote myself full time thanks to a writing grant from the Foundation for Regional and Urban Studies (Oxford), and a scholarship from Colciencias (Bogotá). During this period, I received the academic and personal support of several people. Apart from my supervisors, who meticulously read and provided encouraging comments to each chapter of the thesis, the scholars Stefania Gallini, María Clemencia Ramírez, and Augusto Gómez in Bogotá, offered valuable advice and insights in different stages of the process. I owe special gratitude to my friend and mentor Roberto Franco, who first awoke my interest in the Amazon region and its history; and to my previous teacher and supervisor Martha Herrera, who tirelessly attempted to instruct me in the rigours of the historical discipline.

I want to thank all my friends and family, and especially my parents Gonzalo and Claudia and my sister and brother Talí and Joaquín, who have supported me in many different ways throughout the process. Finally, my deep love and appreciation to María Elisa, who has accompanied me all the way, patiently enduring my obsession with the road, reading and commenting the many drafts of the thesis, and giving me the strength to persevere.

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Maps

Note: All the maps and photographs where no source is cited are the author's.

Acronyms

AGN	Archivo General de la Nación (National General Archive)
ADS	Archivo de la Diócesis de Sibundoy (Archive of the Diocese of Sibundoy)
APCC	Archivo Provincial de los Capuchinos de Cataluña (Capuchin Provincial Archive of Catalonia)
ACNUR	Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)
Corpoamazonia	Corporación para el desarrollo sostenible del sur de la Amazonia (Corporation for sustainable development of Southern Amazonia)
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
IIRSA	Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana (Initiative for Integration of Regional Infrastructure of South America)
IGAC	Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi (National Institute of Geography)
INCODER	Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural (National Rural Development Institute)
INVIAS	Instituto nacional de vías (National Institute of Roads)
IOM	International Organisation for Migration

Introduction
The historical geography of state and frontier

This dissertation is about a road in southwest Colombia. The road, connecting the Andean city of Pasto (department of Nariño) with the port town of Puerto Asís (department of Putumayo), stretches for 230 kilometres, traversing a wide variety of settlements, landscapes and ecosystems, from Andean *páramos*[1] above 3,200 metres to the hot and humid Putumayo lowlands below 300 metres (see map 1). The history of this road dates back to the mid nineteenth century and goes up to the present, during which time it has undergone various transformations, evolving from an indigenous trail to a missionary bridle path, to a colonisation dirt road and, more recently, to a modern road project part of a large interoceanic scheme aimed at connecting the Atlantic and Pacific through Brazil and Colombia. This is a story as intricate and complex as the road's geography, encompassing a wide range of characters, conflicts and events: nineteenth and twentieth century explorers, statesmen and missionaries; ambitious colonisation and transport plans; violent dispossession of indigenous peoples, colonists' unfulfilled expectations of progress and enduring memories of abandonment and isolation; infamous engineers, modern-day planners, and peasant and displaced communities' conflicts over the road's future.

In order to retrace and reconstruct the history of the road, I have combined historical analysis and ethnography, relying on a wide variety of sources and techniques: archive and photographic material, travel writing, press, oral histories, interviews and direct

[1] The term *páramo* refers to a grassland ecosystem located mainly in the upper parts of the northern Andes, in altitudes generally ranging from 3,000 to 4,500 metres above sea level.

observation, among others. This history is structured in the text in two broad parts. The first part (chapters one to three) focuses on the antecedents and the early history of the road (c.1850 to 1930s) and is largely based on archive material collected during 2009 and 2010.[2] The second part (chapters four to six) covers the recent history of the road (1930s-2012) and focuses on a series of processes and practices related to the current road and the ongoing road project. This part is primarily based on ethnographic work in Putumayo undertaken during 2010, and follow-up field trips in 2011 and 2012.

In reconstructing the history of the road my primary aim is not, however, to arrange its many characters, events and practices into a chronological narrative of this infrastructure, but to situate such characters, events, and practices *within* and question *through* them the historical geography of the state and the frontier in the Putumayo region of Colombia. Although the field of historical geography traditionally alludes to "the influence of the past in shaping the geographies of the present and the future",[3] I will use this concept in a broader sense to describe the relations and practices through which the state and the frontier have been discursively and materially constituted. Alternatively, I will argue that state and frontier constitute parts of the same historical and geographical ensemble, and thus cannot be addressed in an isolated way. In this same sense, it is important to emphasise that the two approaches (historical and ethnographic) to the road will not be considered separately but rather as two interrelated ways to explore and interrogate this historical geography.

This twofold approach to the road stems from a central methodological concern, which relates to the dichotomous ways in which concepts tend to be defined. This is the case of the terms "frontier" and "state", which are recurrently invoked in a relation of opposition to one another or through the binary constructions they are imagined to embody:

[2] The archive work was carried out in the Archivo General de la Nación (Bogotá), the Archivo de la Diócesis de Sibundoy (Putumayo), and the Archivo Provincial de los Capuchinos de Cataluña (Barcelona).These archives will be quoted in the text with the abbreviations AGN, ADS, and APCC, respectively. In addition, archive references marked with the abbreviation GT correspond to documents kindly provided by the geographer and historian Gustavo Torres (Mocoa, Putumayo).

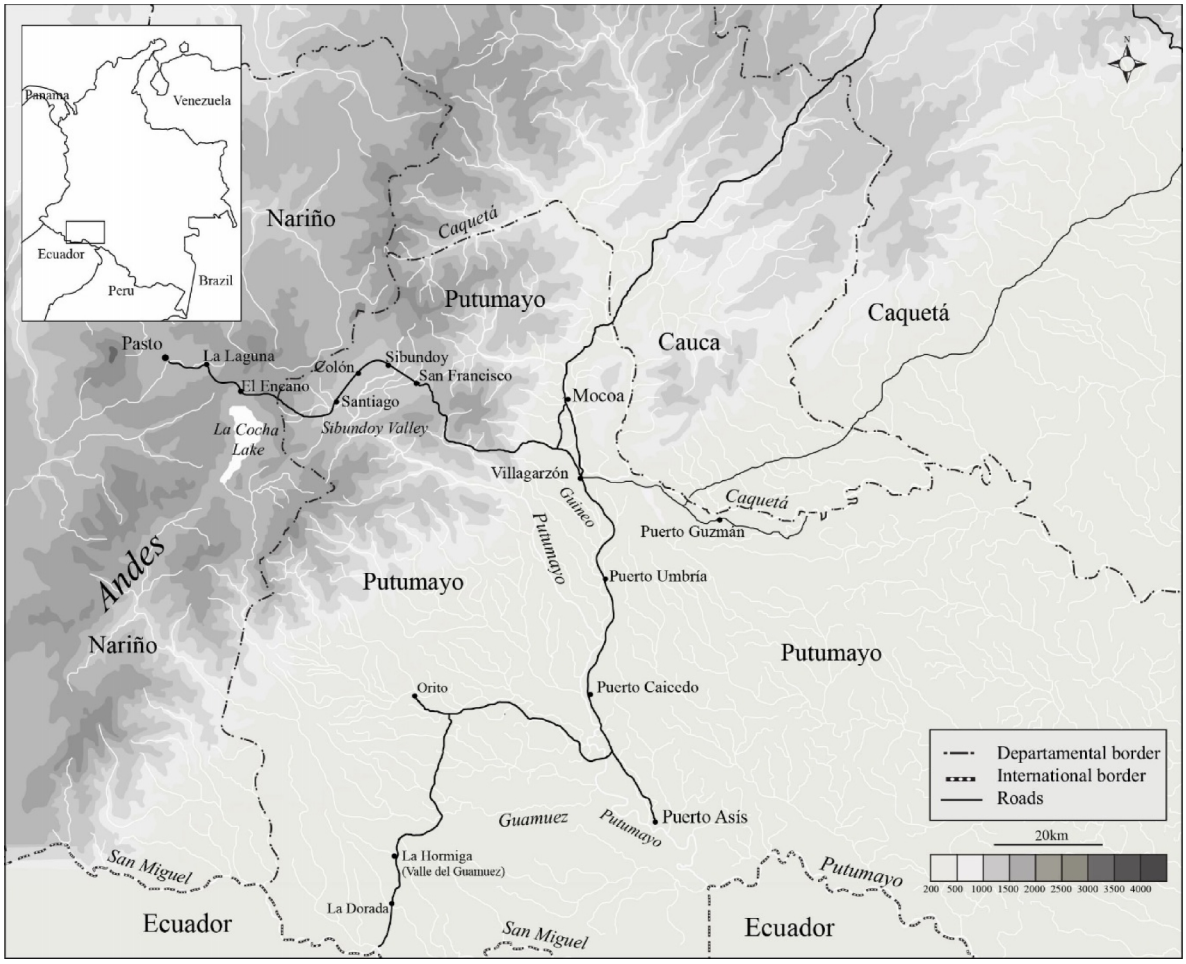
[3] Michael Heffernan, "Historical Geography" in *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, ed. Derek Gregory, 332-335 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009).

"civilisation" versus "savagery", "core" versus "periphery", "centre" versus "margin", and so on. So powerful are these constructions that despite the temporal and conceptual mutations to which they are subjected, they seem to encompass a series of immutable boundaries which we can hardly cross, let alone remove. Still, in another sense, at the level of practice or everyday life, we are constantly faced with situations where these boundaries are revealed as porous or tenuous, and constantly contested and reconfigured.

One of the effects of this gap between the way in which these boundaries are discursively constructed and the practices through which they are daily deconstructed, is that the gap is reproduced in the forms in which the concepts themselves are approached –that is, either the discursive boundaries that endow them with an illusion of coherence are taken for granted, or the these same boundaries are rejected on the basis of myriad events, situations, and practices through which they are called into question. The approach I will take is different and is grounded in the argument that in addressing such concepts we cannot isolate or divorce these two ways of understanding or "seeing" reality. Thus, in speaking of the frontier and the state through the history and everyday practices of the road, I will be arguing that we have to think beyond and question constantly the theoretical and discursive boundaries enclosing these concepts, while at the same time recognise and account for the power and pervasiveness of such boundaries in history and everyday life.

This introductory chapter will address this question of theoretical and discursive boundaries in the context of the historical geography of frontier and state. First, it will be described how these boundaries (between history and geography and frontier and state) have been produced and reproduced in Colombia's historiography and frontier literature. Second, it will be shown how these same boundaries have played a central role in underpinning certain –hegemonic- relationship between the state and the frontier, and how this relationship requires us to see these concepts in a different, dialectical manner. Finally, I will outline the way in which this relationship will be addressed both historically and ethnographically through the dissertation and in the particular context of the road.

Map 1. Area of study



On the geographical basis of history

Colombia's geography has always been a subject that raises passionate and in many ways contradictory feelings. Its variety of climate zones and landscapes -encompassing tropical rainforests, Andean mountain ranges and valleys, plains and coastal regions- is repeatedly praised in terms of its immense biological and cultural diversity. Similarly, its geographical location, being the only South American country with coastlines in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, has been historically conceived as a natural advantage in terms of access to international markets. This exuberant geography, on the other hand, has long been cursed for the many and great "obstacles" it has placed to the country's economic or even cultural development. The old association between climate and racial character, so prevalent in nineteenth century debates around the present and future of the nation state, has not yet

disappeared and is still present in different contexts, for instance in the popular perception of the inhabitants from the coast or *costeños* as lazy or laid back. A more 'objective' claim has to do with the country's rugged topography and its long-lasting implications and colossal costs for geographical integration and the development of transport infrastructure. This situation, which invariably struck the nineteenth century traveller making the long route from the Caribbean coast to the country's capital via the Magdalena River and the torturous Honda-Bogotá trail, would still strike the contemporary traveller when making the same route overland, contemplating the endless lines of lorries slowly crawling up the *cordillera* while wondering -as the nineteenth century traveller did– why is it that Colombia has as its capital a city a thousand kilometres from the sea.

One does not need to be a geographer, let alone an environmental determinist, to see how these salient geographical features have historically and contemporaneously affect Colombians in different ways, from their settlement patterns and economic activities to their cultural identities. These features are also frequently mentioned in the academic literature, emphasising both their positive and negative impacts on the country's society, economy or history. What is striking is how often "geography" is assumed as an immutable reality against which society, economy or history are studied, and how seldom this causality is reversed to ask how these variables might also affect geography or the perceptions we have of it.

A clear, if somewhat extreme, example of this one-sided approach can be found in *Is Geography Destiny? Lessons from Latin America*, a book looking at the influence of geography on Latin America's economic development.[4] The authors, three high profile economists, are primarily concerned "to establish to what extent geography is responsible for differences in development between countries, and more specifically between Latin America and other groups of countries".[5] Drawing largely on the contributions of scholars like David Landes, Jared Diamond or Jeffrey Sachs -which the authors praise for having

[4] John Luke Gallup, Alejandro Gaviria and Eduardo Lora, *Is Geography Destiny? Lessons from Latin America* (Stanford: Inter-American Development Bank, Stanford University Press and The World Bank, 2003).
[5] Gallup et.al., *Geography*, 5.

championed the "rediscovery" of geography in the social sciences-, they start from the assumption that both physical (climate, topography, characteristics of the land) and human (settlement patterns) geographical variables do impact development in different ways.[6] In order to validate this hypothesis they asses such impact through four "basic channels" (health conditions, land productivity, access to markets, and natural disasters) at the regional and country levels, through a number of independent case studies. The latter include Colombia as well as Mexico, Peru, Brazil and Bolivia, chosen due to having "the greatest geographical diversity" within the region.

The chapter on Colombia, not surprisingly, emphasises the country's regional fragmentation and transport costs associated to its topography, as illustrated in the following paragraph:

> The country's geographical barriers, some of which were not overcome until very late in the 20th century, cut off many regions from world markets and discouraged interregional trade, giving rise to a fragmented domestic market. Even those roads and railroads built at the end of the 19th century were designed to connect towns and villages within the same region. In order for roads to connect different regions they would often need to traverse Colombia's mountainous areas, and construction costs were prohibitively high. As a result, Colombia's regions have experienced a high degree of geographical and economic isolation that in many respects persists to the present day as the country continues to have one of the lowest road densities in Latin America".[7]

These variables, together with others such as availability of natural resources or proximity to main urban centres, are regarded in the analysis as significant factors accounting for the country's inter and intra-regional variations in economic development.[8] While it is not the purpose here to discuss the authors' arguments in detail,[9] it is worth mentioning how their

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[6] For a summary of this argument see Jeffrey Sachs, Andrew Mellinger and John Gallup, "Climate, Coastal Proximity, and Development", in *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography,* ed. Gordon L. Clark, Maryann P. Feldman, and Meric S. Gertler, 169-194 (Ofxord: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[7] Gallup et.al. , *Geography*, 90-91.

[8] For a parallel approach discussing the effects of Colombia's geography on governance and economic competitiveness see Santiago Montenegro, *Sociedad abierta, geografía y desarrollo. Ensayos de economía política* (Bogotá, Editorial Norma: 2006), 113-132.

[9] For a critical review see Andrew Sluyter, "Is Geography Destiny?: Lessons from Latin America by John L. Gallup; Alejandro Gaviria; Eduardo Lora; Troubled Harvest: Agronomy and Revolution in Mexico, 1880-2002 Joseph Cotter", *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 95, no. 1, (2005): 232-236; Shawn Van Ausdal, Claudia Leal and Alejandro Guarín, "Cuál Geografía?", *Revista Buen Gobierno*, vol.1, no.3, (2007): 38-39; Bernardo Pérez, "De geografías "desfavorables", "geografías condenantes" y "geografías de éxito", *Revista de Economía Institucional*, vol.6, no.10, (2004): 259-267.

main claims and conclusions are achieved by isolating geography as an explanatory or independent variable. The authors validate this reasoning by stating that the study's objective "is not to discuss the influences operating in the opposite direction —that is, from development (or its lack thereof) to geography",[10] without ever considering that both variables are inexorably intertwined and thus can hardly be approached separately. In doing so, "geography", confined to a few physical and human features, ends up being treated as a subject that is simply assumed rather than discussed. Furthermore, and now that geographical factors are rendered isolated, it is argued that they can be controlled or modified though policy (e.g. investment in research, infrastructure development, health programmes, decentralisation policies) in order to remove or minimize their negative effects on development. Thus the authors' overarching statement that "Is geography Destiny? Perhaps, if its importance is ignored".[11]

The vision of geography as latent *destiny*, which in the economists' rationale is subjected to be altered or even annihilated through policy, is not novel, let alone confined to the realm of mainstream development studies. This is especially true in the case of Colombia's historiography, where geography has long constituted a subject regularly invoked as one of the factors explaining some of the singular features of the country's economic, social, and political history from Pre-Columbian times to the present.[12] Expressions such as "fragmentation", "atomisation", "regionalisation", "dispersion", and "diversity" form part of a common vocabulary used within this literature to depict the manifold direct or indirect influences of geography on the country's historical development.

[10] Gallup et.al. , *Geography*, 8.
[11] Gallup et.al. , *Geography*, 2.
[12] See, for instance: David Bushnell, *The making of modern Colombia. A Nation in spite of itself*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Anthony McFarlane, *Colombia Before Independence: Economy, Society and Politics under Bourbon Rule* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Jaime Jaramillo, "Nación y región en los orígenes del Estado nacional el Colombia", in *Problemas de la formación del estado y de la nación en Hispanoamérica*, ed. Inge Buisson et.al, (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1984); James William Park, *Rafael Núñez and the politics of Colombian regionalism, 1863-1886* (Baton Rouge & London: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); Marco Palacios, "La fragmentación regional de las clases dominantes en Colombia: una perspectiva histórica", *Revista Mexicana de Sociología*, Vol.42, no.4, (1980): 1663-1689; Fernán González, "Consolidación del Estado Nacional", *Controversia*, No.59-60, (1977): 1-148.

A clear example of this "geographically aware" reading of Colombia's history can be found in Frank Safford and Marco Palacios' *Colombia. Fragmented land, divided society*,[13] a condensed historical account of the country from Pre-Columbian times to the late twentieth century. The burden of geography on the country's history, strongly emphasised in the book's title and its cover (showing the gloomy portrait, typical of nineteenth century iconography, of a white traveller carried through the *cordillera* on the back of a *sillero* or native porter) is summarised at the beginning of the introduction as follows:

> Colombia's history has been shaped by its spatial fragmentation, which has found expression in economic atomization and cultural differentiation. The country's historically most populated areas have been divided by its three mountain ranges, in each of which are embedded many small valleys. The historical dispersion of much of the population in isolated mountain pockets long delayed the development of transportation and the formation of an integrated national market. It also fostered the development of particularized local and regional cultures. Politically, this dispersion has manifested itself in regional antagonism and local rivalries, expressed in the nineteenth century war and in at least part of the twentieth century of intercommunity violence.[14]

Throughout the book, the authors lay special emphasis on the relationship between the country's spatial and political fragmentation, and how this situation has historically been both a cause and reflection of Colombia's longstanding difficulties to build a solid project of nation state. This constitutes a well-known argument, especially within the scholarship concerned with the country's long history violence, where the origins and persistence of political and civil strife tend to be associated with a state variously described as "fragmented", "weak", "precarious", "absent", and "co-opted", among others.[15] These adjectives, manifestly geographical and which inevitably evoke the state in a Weberian fashion, are specially pervasive when alluding to the so-called "internal frontiers" or those

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[13] Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[14] Safford and Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land*, ix.

[15] See Marco Palacios, *Between Legitimacy and violence. A history of Colombia, 1875-2002*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007); Fernán González, Ingrid Bolívar and Teófilo Vásquez, *Violencia Política en Colombia. De la nación fragmentada a la construcción del Estado*, (Bogotá: CINEP, 2003); Ingrid Bolívar, *Violencia política y formación del estado. Ensayo historiográfico sobre la dinámica de la Violencia de los cincuenta en Colombia*, (Bogotá: Cinep, Ceso, Uniandes, 2003); Daniel Pécaut, "El rostro ambiguo de Colombia", in *In-sur-gentes. Construir región desde abajo*, ed. William Torres, Luis Ernesto Lasso and Bernardo Tovar, 33-43 (Neiva: Editorial Universidad Surcolombiana, 2003); Ingrid Bolívar, "Sociedad y estado: la configuración del monopolio de la violencia", *Revista Controversia* no.175, Cinep, Bogotá, (1999): 9-39; Daniel Pécaut, *Orden y Violencia: Colombia 1940-1954*, (Bogotá: Cerec, Siglo XXI editores, 1987).

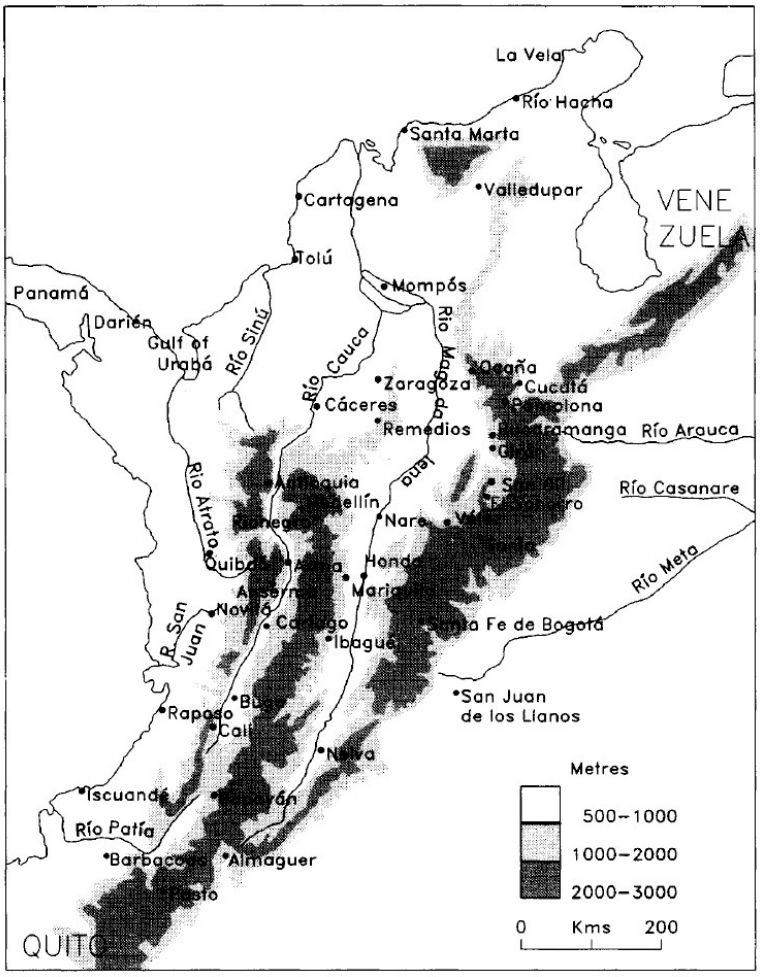
national territories traditionally considered as peripheral, isolated, or excluded from or yet to be assimilated to the state. In these territories, variously estimated to comprise from three quarters to half of the country's total area, the notion of geography as destiny is so embedded that spatial adjectives are often overlapped with temporal or even moral ones, so that peripheral or isolated is equated with "backward", "untamed", "lawless", and so forth. This is the case of the Putumayo, Amazon or *Llanos* (eastern plains) regions, as can be appreciated from this succinct yet emphatic characterisation made by Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, commonly regarded as the father of Colombia's anthropology:

> East of the Andes and beyond the cordilleras, there lie the immense peripheral areas of the Orinoco plains and the Amazon forests, constituting two-thirds of the nation's territory. These sparsely populated and remote regions have never played an important part in the cultural development of the country, whose heart-land has always been the slopes and valley of the cordilleras together with the coasts and northern alluvial plains.[16]

This view is thoroughly endorsed in Palacios and Safford's book, where such regions are conspicuous by their absence, except when it comes to stress the violent dynamics associated to them or their marginal significance within the country's history. One of the few references made to them in the text, for instance, reads: "Colombia's other great forested region, the Putumayo and Amazonia, was visited by few Spanish-speaking Colombians until the twentieth century. And even now these regions are only partly integrated to the national polity and economy".[17] Even more telling is the map that accompanies the book's introduction (below), where these regions, together with the *Llanos*, are partly removed or dissected –for apparent economy of space-, partly shown blank and otherwise filled with the map conventions. This amputated map, different versions of which we can find reproduced indefinitely in history textbooks is, beyond any textual description, the most palpable manifestation of this image of the frontier as the vast and empty spaces falling within the country's borders and yet laying beyond the limit of the nation state.

[16] Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Colombia. Ancient peoples and places*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 29.
[17] Safford and Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented*, 9.

Map 2. "Relief map, with some cities at the end of the colonial period"[18]



The scarce or no attention these territories usually get in general historical surveys contrasts with the large body of literature specifically concerned with their different temporal and spatial processes. Variously labelled as regional, frontier or colonisation studies, this literature has approached the internal frontiers as well as the concept itself from different perspectives.[19] In the particular case of the Putumayo and Amazon regions, we could

[18] Safford and Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented*, 2 (quoted from McFarlane, *Colombia Before Independence*, 11).

[19] For a general review of frontier literature in Latin American see David Weber and Jane Rausch, eds, *Where Cultures Meet. Frontiers in Latin American History* (Wilmington, DE: Jaguar Books, 1994). In the specific context of Colombia see Jane Raush, "La mirada desde la periferia: desarrollos en la historia de la frontera colombiana desde 1970 hasta el presente", *Fronteras de la Historia* vol.8, (2003): 251-60; Clara García, "Enfoques y problemas de la investigación sobre territorios de frontera interna en Colombia", in *Fronteras. Territorios y Metáforas*, ed. Clara García, (Medellín: INER, Universidad de Antioquia, Hombre Nuevo Editores, 2003), 47-60.

identify three broad, and to some extent chronological, strands of thought. The first one dates from the 1940s to the 1970s and roughly coincides with the government's first directed colonisation projects in the region. The influence of Turner's account of the North American frontier experience[20] is notorious in most of the writings of this period, especially in their shared view of frontier territories as extensive and vacant lands waiting to be occupied and exploited.[21] In this way, and though the challenges and difficulties faced by the settlers (lack of government subsidies, poor infrastructure, harsh environments) are often accentuated, the positive influence or potential of the frontier in the country's society and economy is widely stressed, particularly in relation to their role as "safety valves" aimed at solving the great scarcity of land in the interior or central regions. In its most optimistic version,[22] this literature depicted the advance of the frontier as an inevitable and relentless process destined to change the physical and human landscape of the country, as illustrated in the categorical conclusion of a 1950's article discussing the recent colonisation in Eastern Colombia:

> The densely populated Andean heartland of the nation is being subjected to centrifugal forces that are already undermining its immemorial dominance. Although the centre of gravity is still in the cool to cold mountain sectors, the frontier of settlement is actually on the march into the low-lying hot country.[23]

[20] Frederick J. Turner "The significance of the frontier in American History", in *The Frontier in American History*, Frederick J. Turner, 13-42 (Charleston: Bibliobazaar, 2008).

[21] See particularly, Rolf Wesche, *El Desarrollo del poblamiento en el alto valle del río Putumayo*, (Bogotá: IGAG, 1974); Wolfgang Brücher "La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia", Instituto Colombo Aleman, Investigación Científica no.4, (1970): 97-123; Wolfgang Brücher, *La colonización de la selva pluvial en el piedemonte amazónico de Colombia. El territorio comprendido entre el Ariari y el Ecuador* (Bogotá: IGAC, 1968); Janet Townsend, "Perceived worlds of the colonist of tropical rainforest, Colombia", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series vol.2 (4), (1977): 430-458; Milciades Chaves, "La colonización de la Comisaría del Putumayo. Un problema etno-económico-geográfico de importancia nacional", *Boletín de Arqueología,* ICAN, Vol. I, Tomo I, (1945): 567-598; Ernesto Guhl, *Colombia: bosquejo de su geografía tropical*, Vol.2, 239-320 (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de la Cultura, 1976).

[22] Raymond Crist and Charles Nissly, *East from the Andes. Pioneer settlement in the South American heartland* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973); Eduard Hegen, *Highways into the upper Amazon basin. Pioneer lands in Southern Colombia, Ecuador, and Northern Peru* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1966); Eduard Hegen, "The Andean cultural frontier", *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, vol.5, no.4, (1963): 431-436.

[23] Raymond Crist and Ernesto Guhl, "Pioneer settlement in eastern Colombia", *Annual report of the board of regents of the Smithsonian Institution*, Publication 4272, 391-414 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1947), 414.

This enthusiastic view of the frontier, never totally absent from the nation's rhetoric of progress or development and in many ways reminiscent of immemorial visions of *El Dorado*, has been extensively criticised. Since the 1970s onwards, most studies began to offer a radically different picture of frontier processes, recurrently underlining their violent and precarious character. Dispossession of indigenous lands, environmental destruction, uncontrolled resource extraction and social conflict, constitute some of the interwoven dynamics most commonly cited in this literature to describe such processes.[24] Furthermore, and differently from the "safety valve" thesis, frontier development, whether government directed or spontaneous (associated with boom and extractive cycles such as quinine, rubber, timber, oil, and coca), was no longer conceived as a panacea to land and labour conflicts but the displacement of these same conflicts from one setting to another. As for the state, previously regarded as a guiding force directing the advance *of* the frontier, it was now seen as an absent actor or more generally, following a Marxist approach, as an ally of capitalist expansion *in* the frontier. This pessimistic view, by no means limited to the Colombian case,[25] is well summarised in the following statement by a noted Colombian geographer in the mid-1980s in an article evaluating the country's colonisation policies in the Amazon region:

> For those who believed in the possibility of giving land to the dispossessed in Latin American (sic) through the colonisation of the Amazon basin without also changing the relations of production at the national and international level, the end of the 1970s

[24] See, among others, Augusto Gómez, *Putumayo*. *Indios, misión, colonos y conflictos (1845-1970)*, (Popayán: Editorial Universidad del Cauca, 2011); Alejandra Ciro, "De la selva a la pradera: reconfiguración espacial del piedemonte caqueteño 1950-1965", Documento CESO no. 159 (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2009); Camilo Domínguez, *Amazonia Colombiana, economía y poblamiento* (Bogotá: Universidad Externado de Colombia, 2005); Roberto Pineda, "Vorágine o tierra de promisión. Trayectoria histórica de la Amazonia" in *In-sur-gentes,* ed William Torres *et.al.,* 143-178; Eduardo Ariza, Maria Clemencia Ramírez and Leonardo Vega, *Atlas Cultural de la Amazonia Colombiana. La Construcción del territorio en el siglo XX* (Bogotá: ICAN, 1998); Darío Fajardo, "Fronteras, colonizaciones"; Camilo Domínguez and Augusto Gómez, *Nación y etnias. Los conflictos territoriales en la Amazonia colombiana, 1750-1933* (Bogotá: Coama, Disloque Editores, 1994); Roberto Pineda, "El ciclo del caucho (1850-1932)", in *Colombia Amazónica*, 183-209 (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Fondo FEN, 1987); Camilo Domínguez, "National expansion and development policies in the Colombian Amazon", in *Frontier expansion in Amazonia*, eds. Marianne Schmink and Charles H. Hood, 405-418 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1984); Sutti Ortiz, "Colonization in the Colombian Amazon", in Schmink and Hood, *Frontier expansion,* 204-230.

[25] For a similar approach on other Latin American contexts see Joe Foweraker, *The Struggle for Land: a Political Economy of the Pioneer Frontier in Brazil, 1930 to the Present*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Silvio Duncan and John Markoff, "Civilization and barbarism: cattle frontiers in Latin America", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.20 no.4, (1978): 587-620.

> brought a rude awakening. By then it had become apparent that old slogans, such as "Land without people for people without land" or "New lands for new men", were only so many empty words. Recent data confirmed the occurrence in colonized areas of the same trends observed in agricultural ones: the decomposition of the peasantry and the concentration of landholdings. The peasant colonist does not migrate alone. Nor does migration take place in a social vacuum. Rather, colonists who move into new areas reproduce the peasant social relations of productions on the frontier. In effect, the colonist does not create a new free space on the frontier; he simply enlarges the geographic context in which peasants are dominated.[26]

Although this perspective is still widely held in relation to current extractive economies or infrastructure development associated with them,[27] more recent scholarship has re-examined the notion of frontier itself, highlighting the lack of a single definition or interpretation and hence insisting on its multiple and divergent meanings.[28] Of particular relevance within this holistic or broad approach, is the conceptualisation of the frontier not as clearly delimited territories but dynamic spaces of both convergence and differentiation on multiple geographical scales (regional, local, transnational or cross-border) and sociocultural levels (identitarian, inter and intra-ethnic, linguistic). Equally significant in this approach, is its shift from the traditional notion of frontier processes as the sole effect of centrifugal forces from centre to periphery, to a deeper understanding and valuing of the dynamics and characteristics peculiar to frontier societies, including endogenous processes and practices of state-making.[29] The frontier, in other words, no longer a geographical

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[26] Domínguez, *National expansion*, 405.

[27] This is for instance the case of the Putumayo road project, which has been strongly criticised for having an extractive logic underlying the rhetoric of economic integration (see chapter 4).

[28] See, among others, Carlos Zárate, "Amazonia: la historia desde la frontera", in *Amazonia colombiana. Imaginarios y realidades*, eds. Juan Álvaro Echeverry and Catalina Pérez, 55-76 (Bogotá: Cátedra Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2011); Carlos Zárate, *Silvícolas, siringueros y agentes estatales. El surgimiento de una sociedad transfronteriza en la Amazonia de Brasil, Perú y Colombia 1880-1932* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Imani, 2008); Margarita Chaves, "Cabildos multiétnicos e identidades depuradas", in García, *Fronteras,* 121-135; Jean-Pierre Goulard, "Cruce de identidades en EL Trapecio Amazónico colombiano", in García, *Fronteras,* 87-101; Maria Clemencia Ramírez, "El departamento del Putumayo en el contexto del suroccidente colombiano. Ordenamiento territorial y diferencias intrarregionales", in Torres, *In-sur-gentes*, 203-239; Claudia López, "Los Ticuna frente a los procesos de nacionalización en la frontera entre Brasil, Colombia y Perú", *Revista Colombiana de Antropología*, vol.38, Bogotá, (2002): 77-104; Maria Clemencia Ramírez, *Frontera fluida entre andes, piedemonte y selva: el caso del valle del Sibundoy, siglos XVI-XVIII* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura Hispánica, 1996)

[29] On this particular issue of local processes of state-making in the context of Putumayo see Maria Clara Torres, *Estado y coca en la frontera colombiana. El caso del Putumayo* (Bogotá: Odecofi-Cinep, 2011); Maria Clemencia Ramírez *et.al*., *Elecciones, coca, conflicto y partidos políticos en Putumayo 1980-2007* (Bogotá: Icanh, Cinep, 2010); Maria Clara Torres, "Comunidades y coca en el Putumayo: prácticas que hacen aparecer al estado", *Controversia, no. 188* (Bogotá: CINEP, 2007).

margin of the state but a centre in itself, appears as space with a territoriality, identity, and history of its own.

It would be difficult to draw a parallel in the treatment given to the frontier by general history textbooks and the frontier scholarship reviewed, especially in its most comprehensive version. The most obvious reason for this lies on the diametrically opposed meaning ascribed to the concept itself in both approaches. In the former, the frontier, conceived as the fringe of the state or the territories yet to be integrated to it, is assigned a marginal role in the country's history, largely confined to the densely populated valleys and slopes of the cordilleras and the northern coast. In the latter, where the degree of integration or assimilation to the state is not assumed as a measure of historical development or relevance, the frontier, accordingly, is no longer placed in a relationship of peripherality to a cultural, political, or economic centre. Yet, and despite the patent conceptual divergences, both views implicitly conceive the frontier and the state as two detached spaces or realms existing independently of each other. The other perspectives on the frontier, on the other hand, though stressing the connection between both orders, do not overcome this dichotomy. This is essentially because no matter if the geographical expansion of the frontier is attached to the historical development of the state and realisation of the nation's egalitarian ideals –as in the Turnerian version-, or if -as in the Marxist reading- the state is assumed as embodiment of capital or class interests, the relationship between state and frontier is likewise perceived as a sort of zero-sum game where the expansion of one is expressed in the contraction of the other.

On the dialectics of state and frontier

In alluding to the notion of a historical geography of state and frontier, I imply that the boundary between these orders or realms cannot be so easily traced or, alternatively, that we cannot approach them separately. On the contrary, I would like to argue that they are intimately connected or form part of a dialectical process. This means that in studying the state, in reconstructing its origins and historical trajectory, we cannot leave aside the role played by the frontier. This role, as I will try to show, has been vital throughout this process,

just not in the way suggested by advocates of Turner's thesis or promoting the nation's egalitarian and democratic ideals. Contrastingly, I will sustain, this role has to be understood in the way it has helped create and preserve a certain *hegemonic* political, spatial, and social order. In the same way, it will also be argued that the systematic delineation and silencing or condemnation of the frontier in official or even academic narratives of the state may not be a reflection of an immutable geographical reality, but an expression of how this reality has been discursively and materially constructed. Put differently, my primary concern will not be to determine the extent in which geography has shaped the historical process of state-building, but how this process has been inextricably tied to the fabrication and perpetuation of certain spatial, social, and racial cultural dualisms.

I will explore the origins and consolidation of this order in the first part of the thesis, specifically in the context of the different discourses and practices through which the road was conceived and realised, a story that begins with the early nineteenth century post-independent quest for geographical integration and culminates with the conclusion of the road in the 1930s. This part is largely a journey through different archives, travel narratives, photographic and cartographic constructions which together shed light on both the power of state myths and the gap between such myths and the mundane or everyday practices of state-making. The main aim here, however, is to show how the state and the frontier emerged as two apparently irreconcilable and yet indivisible orders, the latter embodying not an obstacle but an essential condition to the former's legitimacy and hegemony. This process, which, as will be argued was inseparable from how the Colombian nation was *imagined* or discursively constructed, will necessarily require us to rethink the concepts of state and frontier. My central purpose in doing so, as I hope will become clear in due course, is not to offer a new theory of these concepts but to question some of the long-standing assumptions around them and, more importantly, to interrogate the role such assumptions have played in the historical geography of state and frontier.

In addressing the idea of the state, I will draw upon Corrigan's argument that "no historical or contemporary form of ruling can be understood (1) as or in its own discursive regime or image repertoire terms; (2) without investigating the historical genealogy, archaeology,

origination (and transmutation) of those terms *as forms*".[30] There are two interrelated corollaries that stem from this premise which are of particular significance to the argument to be developed here. The first is that what a genealogy or archaeology of the state (a deconstruction and mapping of the multiple layers and practices through which it is configured, performed, contested, and subverted) reveals is how it often lacks the coherence and homogeneity it is usually attributed. This assumption is commonly found in ethnographical and anthropological approaches to the state, which have vigorously challenged the idea of the state as an abstract and monolithic realm standing above "society", "community", "nature", etc., and instead stressed the many connections and interactions between these spheres.[31] Paying close attention to these connections and interactions, as this literature suggests, represents a central task in studying the state, for they constitute an inherent –rather than incidental- aspect of state-making. This is precisely the case of the Putumayo road, which as I shall illustrate mirrors not so much the relentless expansion of the state over the Putumayo frontier, as a turbulent process plagued with conflicts, setbacks, obstacles, and failures constantly reflecting its unstable, multilayered, and often contradictory character.

The second corollary is that this same genealogy or archaeology, while questioning the binary or dichotomous images of the state-society/culture/nature relationship, must also

[30] Philip Corrigan, "State Formation", in *Everyday forms of state formation. Revolution and the negotiation of rule in Mexico*, eds Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent, xvii-xix (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), xviii (emphasis in original).

[31] For a general overview of this literature, see: Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, eds., *The Anthropology of the State: A reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Christian Krohn-Hansen and Knut Nustad, eds, *State formation. Anthropological perspectives* (London Pluto Press, 2005); Joseph and Nugent, *Everyday forms*; Veena Das and Deborah Poole, eds., *Anthropology in the margins of the state* (Santa Fe School of American Research Press, 2004); Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *States of imagination. Ethnographic explorations of the postcolonial State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "The anthropology of the State in the age of globalization. Close encounters of a deceptive kind", *Current Anthropology* vol. 42 No.1 (2001): 125-138. Other historical and ethnographic studies that have paid special attention to the social and cultural forms in which the state is embedded and reproduced include: Richard Kernaghan, *Coca's Gone. Of might and right in the Huallaga post-boom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Patrick Carroll, *Science, culture, and modern stare formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State. Nature, money, and modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State*, (London & New York: Routledge, 1997); David Nugent, "Building the state, making the nation: the bases and limits of state centralization in "modern" Peru, American Anthropologist, vol.96 no.2, (1994): 333-369.

deal with the fact that the agency and power of the state is largely dependent on the production and permanence of such images. In other words, as argued by Mitchell, the task of studying the state implies not only refusing to take for granted binary constructions of political and social reality –we should also add here "natural" reality- but accounting for *why* and *how* these constructions are produced.[32] An alternative way to understand this point is through Lefebvre's notion of state-building as a threefold process entailing the production of a "physical space" (transport, communication and information networks and flows, financial circuits), a "social space" (laws, symbols, institutions, values), and a "mental space" (the "directly lived or conceptually elaborated" representations of the state).[33]

Regardless of the way we assume the state (an "instrument" of class domination, the "monopoly of violence" on a given territory, an "effect" of governmental or power technologies) this dual or –in Lefebvre's version- three-dimensional character is essential to grasp the way in which it is crafted and manifests in practice. The main reason is that, in order to understand how domination, violence or, more broadly, power functions in everyday life, we have to account for the multiple dimensions or layers (material and discursive, symbolic and physical, concrete and abstract) in which it is rooted and expressed. This assumption, as I will attempt to show, is critical to understand the hegemonic nature of the state project in the Colombian case.

This last point leads us directly to the subject of the frontier, and concretely to the role it has played in this process or historical geography. A central question that could help us realize the meaning and significance of this role is why, after almost two centuries of the country's existence as an independent state and its long-term professed efforts and schemes to "assimilate" it, this frontier remains largely unchanged. Against this claim, it could be argued that its boundary has receded –though a conservative estimate would still amount to half of the country's area- or that its nineteenth century portrayal as "savage" or "barbarian" has given way to more "objective" depictions such as "undeveloped" or

[32] Timothy Mitchell, "Society, economy, and the state effect", in *The Anthropology of the State: A reader*, eds. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil. Gupta, 169-186 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).
[33] Henri Lefebvre, "Space and the State", in *Henri Lefebvre. State, space, world: selected essays*, edited by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, 223-253 (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota press, 2009) 224, 225.

"backward". Yet the fact remains that, despite the multiple mutations in representation and territorial recompositions the frontier has undergone in time, its *image* as a vast no man's land still prevails. This is just as true in the above referred amputated maps of the country where its absence insinuates its standing perception as *terra incognita* or *terra nullius*, as in the daily media, where we hear of it as those distant territories neglected or forgotten by the state, whose place is largely "occupied" of "filled" by subversive or outlaw forces. This image is inversely echoed in the frontier itself, where the predominant view of state tends to be that of a remote entity or *persona* that has not yet arrived, and whose absence is manifested in the lack of basic services, roads, governmental support, and the like.

The dominant, and seemingly obvious, answer to this question, is that the state has historically been too "weak" or simply unwilling to reach and control its internal frontiers, an explanation in which, as it was noted, geography tends to carry a burden of destiny. This explanation goes hand in hand with an approach to the state that is essentially Weberian or –as the classical definition goes- "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory".[34] Put differently, in this approach the state's "success" -or failure- is measured against its capacity to exert *physical* control or domination on a given territory. Yet, if we again consider that domination or control is not solely grounded on physical force (whether legitimate or not) but also on the production and perpetuation of material and imaginary boundaries or, as it has been suggested, that state legitimacy or sovereignty is realised or dependent on the existence of different types of margins,[35] this explanation begins to fall apart. This is so because in this perspective, the frontier re-emerges again but in a thoroughly different light, not as stateless territory or an obstacle threating the state's political, economic, and social order, but as a *condition of possibility* guaranteeing the existence of this order.

[34] Max Weber, "Politics as vocation", in *From Max* Weber, eds H.H. *Gerth and C.W. Mills* (London: Routledge, 1998), 78 (emphasis in original).

[35] Veena Das and Deborah Poole, "State and its margins: comparative ethnographies", in Das and Poole, *Anthropology,* 3-33. See also Thomas Blom and Finn Stepputat, "Introduction", in *Sovereign bodies. Citizens, migrants, and states in the postcolonial world,* eds. Thomas Blom and Finn Stepputat, 1-36 (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

If we accept this perspective, then we have to rethink the very meaning of the frontier. The argument that I will put forward in this regard is that the frontier does not constitute a *territory* excluded from the order of the state –whether this order is expressed in geographical, political, or juridical terms- but a *space* whose assimilation or incorporation to this order has historically depended on its exclusion from the *imaginary order* of the nation. Alternatively, it will be contended that frontier and state have been historically and spatially constructed through a relation of *inclusive exclusion*, an idea that stems from Agamben's theory of the state of exception.[36] This relation, which I will explore and emphasise through the road's events, characters and practices is, I will argue, crucial to understand the historical geography of state and frontier.

This view of the frontier does not claim to be exhaustive or mutually exclusive with other perspectives. Furthermore, the frontier I am concerned with can be considered primarily geographical and, broadly speaking, fits within the traditional notion of internal frontier above alluded. It is important to emphasise, however, that the Colombian Putumayo is far from homogeneous and, on the contrary, comprises a highly diverse region in both cultural, social, political, and economic terms.[37] In this sense, my aim is not to represent this region as a uniform territory or mirror against which the state can be *read* or examined, but a highly uneven and complex geographical and social space where the state and, more specifically, this relation of *inclusive exclusion* manifests in many different and uneven ways. In doing so, I will contend that in reflecting upon the idea of the frontier in general, we should think of a notion whose meaning transcends or is not restricted to a specific spatial, temporal, or social context, but rather speaks of a *condition* embodying this relation of *inclusive exclusion*, regardless of the ways or forms in which this relation is expressed or encountered.

[36] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign power and bare life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[37] For a detailed description of Putumayo's inter and intra-regional differences see Ramírez, "El departamento"

Making sense of the frontier

The vision of frontiers, peripheries or margins as spaces underpinning hegemonic political and economic orders or -more abstractly- as the reverse side of civilisation on its manifold expressions, is not new. We could cite many well-known literary examples where this vision is plainly expressed, from Conrad's classic tale of colonial violence in the Belgian Congo, *Heart of Darkness*, to Coetzee's placeless account of the Empire in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, to Herzog's fictionalisation of Lope de Aguirre's dramatic journey in the Amazon in his movie *Aguirre: the wrath of God*, to José Eustasio Rivera's portrait of a man's descent into violence in his novel *La Vorágine* (The Vortex). This idea is also present in theoretical and historical accounts of capitalism or imperialism, a typical example of this being Negri and Hardt's *Empire*, where the centrality of frontier spaces in the authors' argument is clearly emphasised in the assertion that "In effect, one might say that the sovereignty of Empire itself is realised at the margins, where borders are flexible and identities are hybrid and fluid. It would be difficult to say which is more important to Empire, the center or the margins".[38]

This same view has also been variously endorsed in the specific context of the Colombian Amazon and Putumayo regions, although it would be difficult to group this literature under a single theme.[39] The most systematic and exhaustive attempt to link this idea of the

[38] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 39. Although in a somewhat different vein, Andre Gunder Frank's influential thesis on the development of underdevelopment
can be read in a similar light, particularly in relation to the historical dominance of the "metropolis" over the "periphery", see Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical studies in Chile and Brazil* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969); for a more theoretical account examining the association of the frontier with different discursive constructions of nature and the role of them in the expansion of capitalism see Neil Smith, *Uneven Development. Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), 18-30.

[39] For a discussion on the role of nineteenth century imageries of the Amazon frontier in the historical development of the nation state see Germán Palacio, *Fiebre de tierra caliente. Una historia ambiental de Colombia 1850-1930*, (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, ILSA, 2006); in the specific context of Putumayo's rubber era the most thorough examination of the mimetic connection between colonial violence and representation is the work of Michael Taussig, see Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man. A study on terror and healing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); in the context of the coca economy during 1990s Maria Clemencia Ramírez explored the relationship between dominant representations of the peasant and practices of state legitimation and violence, see Maria Clemencia Ramírez, *Between the guerrillas and the state: the cocalero movement, citizenship, and identity in the Colombian*

frontier with the origins and historical trajectory of the nation state in Colombia, though, is found in Margarita Serje's book *El revés de la nación. Territorios salvajes, fronteras y tierras de nadie* (The reverse of the nation. Wild territories, frontiers, and no man's lands).[40] Serje's work is an attempt to critically interrogate the multiple historical and historiographical silences, erasures, and misrepresentations through which the frontier territories have been discursively constructed, along with the continuous violence this process has entailed. The author's understanding of this process, as expressed in the following excerpt, stems from a well-established view of modernity as an all-embracing force driven largely by the creative destructive nature of capital:

> As long as the periphery of the modern *order* is conceived as disorder and continuous violence, the intervention of the centre, either the centre in a global scale or the centre in a local scale, is legitimised. What guides this design of infinite progress is an impulse devouring peoples and landscapes in order to satiate the voracious appetite of its economy, based on the modern mode of production, which demands peripheries, margins and frontiers, backyards and underworlds, where, precisely, in setting a limit to the to the universality of its order, it creates tolerance zones where it is possible to trespass, subordinating peoples and devastating resources. A perfect stage where the end justifies the means, required for the devastating production of wealth is configured there: the no man's lands, the "red zones" and the "internal frontiers". For this reason, the margins of civilisation can be described, more than realities external to it, as its condition of possibility.[41]

Following this general postulate, Serje embarks on a far-reaching journey through the multiple metaphors and discursive constructions through which those peripheries, margins or frontiers have been crafted in time and space, as well as the vital role these constructions have played in the consolidation of a hegemonic project of nation state. This journey, which the author describes as "an ethnography of the production of context", encompasses a wide array of characters and representational forms, from nineteenth century foreign travellers and creole elites' narratives and visions of the country's geography, to contemporary academics' discourses on the "fragmented" character of the nation state in its various

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Amazon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); in this same context see also Maria de la Luz Vásquez, "De repúblicas independientes a zona de despeje. Identidades y estado en los márgenes", en *Identidades culturales y formación del Estado en Colombia. Colonización, naturaleza y cultura*, ed. Ingrid Bolívar, 119-207 (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, CESO, 2006).

[40] Margarita Serje, *El revés de la nación. Territorios salvajes, fronteras y tierras de nadie* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes-CESO, 2011).

[41] Serje, *El revés de la nación*, 22. All the translations from Spanish to English in this dissertation are mine.

expressions, to official and non-governmental old and new recipes for "development", and to NGO's and *hippies'* essentialist views on the preservation of "nature" and "culture". The notion of context is of particular relevance throughout the analysis, as it illustrates the process through which these narratives and views have become entrenched or established, thus determining "a particular way of reading and interpreting reality as well as the ways in which it is possible to intervene upon it".[42]

Serje's ethnography of context is crucial to understand the significance of Colombia's internal frontiers as spaces lying not outside but at the very core of the state project and, more concretely, spaces legitimizing the violence in which this project is rooted. However, and somewhat paradoxically, the centrality of the frontier in the author's argument has the only purpose of underlining its existence as an abstract space whose reality is confined to the realm of representation. Mute, subdued, insubstantial, the frontier in this view only figures as long as it embodies the obverse of a ubiquitous Faustian modernity and its pervasive incarnations such as the state, development, civilisation, and capital. Once this view takes over the entire narrative, the reader cannot be surprised by contentions such as that "those who oppose the rationality of development have two options, the same they have had throughout colonial history: either they prepare to be possessed by it or they will be annihilated"[43] or, more categorically, that "the poetic of the myth [of the nation] that overlays the design of dehumanisation conceals the principle of civilisation which transforms all these [frontier] groups in an impoverished mass, available, fodder, ignorant and backward".[44] In other words, this a view that despite its explanatory power and narrative force, begins by questioning certain universal metanarratives just to end up reifying others.

Again, the question is not to deny or conceal the power and effects that hegemonic constructions of the world have on people's lives and the spaces they inhabit. Nor is it to simply wrap people's responses to these constructions and the violent practices stemming

[42] Serje, *El revés de la nación*, 37.
[43] Serje, *El revés de la nación*, 285.
[44] Serje, *El revés de la nación*, 303.

from them under the labels of "alternative", "plural" or "contingent" modernities.[45] The question is that even an ethnography of "context" aiming at unveiling the genealogy of such constructions along with its myths and rhetorical fictions, must deal with the *material* realities which they are confronted with. Such an ethnography would find that margins, peripheries or frontiers are nor inert spaces or the simple locus of sovereign power (or, conversely, resistance) but, as it has been suggested,[46] highly dynamic sites where the power and knowledge practices in which modernity, capital or the state are embedded are constantly reconfigured, appropriated, and subverted. Put in a more general way, such an ethnography would have to acknowledge that "reality" never entirely resembles the narratives in which it is inscribed, and thus that its task is not only to account for the effects that such narratives have on reality but to question them in the light of reality.

In suggesting that the historical geography of frontier and state has been mediated by a relation of *inclusive exclusion*, I have implicitly accentuated the asymmetrical nature of this relation. This is as evident in the dichotomous language through which this relation has been constructed and is expressed ("core" versus "periphery", "centre" versus "margin", "civilisation" versus "savagery") as in the violence this language has historically sustained. Still, the very notion of relationship, uneven as it might be, implies interaction, which in other words means that the frontier is not a mere discursive projection of state or an amorphous amalgamation of peoples and landscapes passively submitting to power, nor the state an all-encompassing force standing above society and nature.

The overall aim in this dissertation is to account for this relation of *inclusive exclusion* in both its discursive and material dimensions or, more precisely, in the continuous and dialectical movement from one to the other. In the first part of the text, as mentioned, I seek to outline the origins or sources of this relation through the different events, rituals, and characters involved in the early history of the road. In the second part, I describe some

[45] For an anthropological critique on the different approaches to modernity see James Ferguson, "Decomposing Modernity: History and Hierarchy after Development", in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond, eds. Ania* Loomba, et.al., 166-181 (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005); Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005) 113-149.
[46] Das and Poole, "State and its margins"

of the ways in which this relation manifests in the quotidian or everyday life of frontier peoples in the context of the road. These ways are diverse and range from the current road's precipitous geography and its countless tragedies to the long-unfulfilled promises to replace it, to the ongoing road project' legibility practices and resettlement policies on its area of influence. This is a story that reveals the overwhelming presence that this infrastructure has had in the life of Putumayenses, and where the state surfaces in various and often contradictory forms: feelings and memories of isolation, abandonment and neglect, dreams of "progress", desires of inclusion and belonging.

This second part, however, is mostly about how people make sense of and challenge this relation of *inclusive inclusion* in everyday life. Just as there are many instances where this relation is exposed, there are many different practices through which it is contested and made sense of, from the simple act of remembering to the hazardous activity of driving on the road, to the everyday struggles and tactics of those affected by the road project. These forms of contestation and making sense, as I will try to show, reveal the dichotomous oppositions through which the relationship between state and frontier has been configured, as well as the conflicts and struggles within which this relationship is reproduced, reconfigured, and called into question. These conflicts and struggles will also show how the acts of making sense constitute a political practice through which people *locate* themselves against events in spatial, temporal and moral terms. In doing so, geography and history will appear in a different light: not as fate or context but highly contentious realms within which people make claims about their past, present and possible futures.

These different ways of confronting and making sense of the history and geography of the road will also cast light on the uneven character of the frontier. They will show, for instance, how narratives or views of the same event change depending on where people are *situated* against such event, and how amid the silences and divergences that distance one narrative from another underlies conflicting worlds. Put another way, they will show that in the discursive and material space encompassed by the road there exist not one but many and often contesting frontiers or, as mentioned above, how the frontier embodies a condition of *inclusive exclusion* that is expressed in different and often uneven ways. Finally, in the conclusion, I will reflect upon this condition in relation to the symbolic and material violence to which it is subjected, and the ways in which it can be contested.

Part I

Chapter 1
State and frontier imagined

Is not the secret of the state, hidden because it is so obvious, to be found in space? (Henri Lefebvre 2009, p.228)

Reyes' dream

The 30th December sessions of the Second Pan-American Conference, hosted by Mexico from October 1901 to January 1902, were marked by a special event. On the date in question, General Rafael Reyes, Colombian plenipotentiary to France and one of the country's delegates to the Conference, spoke of his explorations in the Putumayo region in the 1870s, during which time he and his brothers were exporting quinine to Europe and North America. The presentation was not part of the ordinary Conference schedule, and despite the repeated insistence of his colleagues to "reveal" his discoveries, Reyes, we are told, fearing "he might be suspected of seeking notoriety by drawing public attention to his own person", was reluctant to break his "modest silence".[1] Surely this gesture was more about a gentleman's etiquette, for the General not only jealously treasured his expedition notes but he did not miss a chance to entertain his colleagues in private with his stories. No doubt he had repeatedly referred to his recent encounter in New York with President Roosevelt, to whom he gave an account of his journeys and presented his ambitious navigation project of the Amazon and its main tributaries. Mr. Roosevelt, the eulogistic chronicler tells us, after enthusiastically listening to Reyes' account of the immense territory

[1] Rafael Reyes, *Across the South American Continent. Explorations of the brothers Reyes. Paper read at the Pan-American Conference by General R. Reyes the Delegate for Columbia* (sic), (Bogotá: Flota Mercante Grancolombiana, 1979 [1902]), 5.

"revealed" by him and his brothers, uttered the following words: "That region is a New World undoubtedly, destined to promote the progress and welfare of humanity".[2] Supposedly, following this encouraging encounter, Roosevelt had personally recommended the US representative at the Conference to use his "best influence" in order to persuade the other delegates to give special consideration to his project. As for the Colombian General, with his discoveries having been praised by Roosevelt in such terms, he now felt it was a "moral" duty to share them with his colleagues in Congress.

It was in this context that Reyes finally addressed the members of the Conference that 30th of December. His speech certainly must have captivated the audience, as he narrated his travels as a truly epic journey, where the terrifying presence of the unknown and the terrible privations and dangers endured by the discoverer were only surpassed by the incommensurable riches he unveiled and conquered for the sake of progress and civilisation.[3] The opening episodes, those describing the crossing and descent of the south-eastern Colombian Andes in search of the Putumayo River, cannot but resemble the dramatic Spanish expeditions in the hunt for the elusive *El Dorado.*

> We started from the city of Pasto, situated on the summit of the Andes, under the equinoctial line. The immense region which extends from that city for more than 4000 miles to the Atlantic, was then *completely unknown*. We traversed a-foot the great mass of the Cordillera of the Andes, which rises more than 12.000 above the level of the sea, up to the region of perpetual snow. Where this ceases there are immense plains, called paramos (sic), upon which there grow neither trees nor flowers and where animal life completely disappears. We wandered for a whole month on those cold solitudes, guided only by the compass. They are covered with a fog as dense as that of the high latitudes of the North in winter; there were days in which we had to remain on the same spot in semi-darkness, without being able to advance a single step, the thermometer falling to 10 degrees below zero, a temperature made unbearable by the lack of shelter and shoes….After marching for a month through that desert, in which perished, due to the

[2] Reyes, *Across the South American Continent*, 5.

[3] The specific expedition Reyes referred to in the talk was the long journey he made by himself from the city of Pasto (Colombia) to Rio de Janeiro during the years of 1874 and 1875, looking to open an export route for quinine and rubber. However, his presentation at the Pan-American Conference is largely a composite account of the numerous trips he made in the Putumayo in company of his brothers between 1870 and 1884. This is indicated by the fact that the narrative is presented in third person (suggesting the presence of his brothers), and also since it incorporates events that took place at other expeditions. A complete account of the years Reyes spent in the Putumayo is contained in a series of letters he wrote to his sons during the early 1910s, published posthumously as his Memoirs. See Rafael Reyes, *Memorias 1850-1885* (Bogotá: Fondo Cultural Cafetero, 1986).

> intense cold, two men of the expedition, of the ten who carried provisions on their backs, we reached the limits of those solitary pampas which appeared like the product of a nature in progress of formation. We were at the Eastern watershed of the Andes. An ocean of light and verdure appeared before our eyes, in marked contrast to the shadows and solitudes which we had just traversed; we had before us the abrupt declivity of the Cordillera, which descends in some parts almost vertically, then in slightly inclined slopes, and beyond in perfect levels for miles and miles down to the ocean…We penetrated these *unknown forests*, opening roads with the machete through brambles, briars and creepers which obstructed our passage. Arriving at the vertical slopes of the Cordillera, in places which were impassable, we had to descend by the aid of ropes.[4]

This was just the beginning. The "Colombian Stanley",[5] as Reyes was referred to by the chronicler, continues his enthralling account by describing the sufferings and perils he and his brothers endured in their passage through the "virgin forests", and then during their navigation of the Putumayo up to its intersection with the Amazon River. Along the Putumayo River they would encounter numerous "cannibal tribes", among them the "powerful and warlike" Mirañas, of whom the daring General stated that he was "the first white man whom those savages had seen".[6] The brothers made friends with the powerful chief "Chua", who kindly offered them "their dishes of human flesh" from their bitter enemies the Huitotos, and also provided them with oarsmen and canoes to continue their trip. After fifteen days hunting and fishing with the Mirañas, they resumed their journey in company of the robust crew offered by Chua. It took them three months to descend the Putumayo River, a time which seemed to the brothers to be "an eternity". During the days they were exhausted by the extreme heat, the scarce food, and the fatigue of managing the canoe; at nights, incessantly harassed by the dense clouds of mosquitoes, having to bury themselves under the burning sands of the deserted beaches along the river. According to

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[4] Reyes, *Across the South American Continent,* 14-15 (emphasis added).

[5] Reyes was a contemporary of Stanley, a figure whom he admired together with David Livingstone. He actually made reference to them in his chronicle (Reyes, *Across the South American Continent,* 14), comparing the Welsh-American and Scottish explorers' expeditions in Africa to his South America version. This parallel is worth mentioning since the figure and writings of Reyes can be better understood in the context of the relationship between nineteenth century geographical exploration and imperialism. For a reading of Reyes in this particular respect see Felipe Martínez, "Héroes de la civilización. La Amazonia en la obra del General Rafael Reyes", *Anuario colombiano de historia social y de la cultura*, vol.40, no.2 (forthcoming). For a broader discussion of this subject in the context of European imperialism see, amongst others Felix Driver, *Geography Militant. Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Morag Bell, Robin Butlin and Michael Heffernan, eds., *Geography and imperialism*. 1820-1940, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Anne Godlewska, and Neil Smith, eds., *Geography and Empire,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

[6] Reyes, *Across the South American Continent,* 16.

Reyes, they suffered the same fatigues as those endured by their "savage companions". Still, it was thanks to this circumstance, he stated, that they earned the affection and respect of the savages, "who recognize no other superiority than that of strength".[7]

Their arrival at the Brazilian town of San Antonio, at the junction of the Putumayo and Amazon Rivers, marks a turning point in the narrative. The expedition had finally entered "civilised" land again, six months after leaving the city of Pasto. The brothers had succeeded in their "patriotic" enterprise of being the first in "discovering" a river apt for the navigation of steamers, which would allow for communication between the Colombian Andes and the Atlantic Ocean in Brazil. From San Antonio they would catch a steamer to the city of Belém at the mouth of the Amazon, and from there they would set sail for Rio de Janeiro. In Rio, as the news of their journey spread in the city, they were the object of numerous manifestations of applause and congratulation on the part of the authorities and distinguished personalities. The most prominent of them was the Emperor Dom Pedro II, whose "majestic and commanding stature" and "highly cultivated intellect" particularly impressed the young Reyes, who was then 25 years old. The Emperor, Reyes tells us, "had passion for Geography and the exploration of the immense territories of his empire",[8] to the point that not only received him one afternoon in his palace, but listened with great interest to the account of his odyssey.

After two months in the capital, the celebrated expeditionaries began their return journey to Colombia. They bought a steamer in Belém, which they navigated 1,800 miles upstream to the mouth of the Putumayo and then another 1,200 to its final stop at *La Sofía*, a river port which Reyes had named after his beloved fiancée. The climactic point of the journey, the moment the small vessel made its triumphant entry into the waters of the Putumayo, was narrated by Reyes as a grandiose conquest:

> We can say that it was one of the happiest days of our lives, when we saw, for the first time, the flag of Colombia float from the stern of the vessel waiving in the breeze. This vessel was to realize the conquest of civilisation and progress for our country and to improve the horrible condition of thousands of savages who at the mere contact with the

[7] Reyes, *Across the South American Continent,* 17.
[8] Reyes, *Across the South American Continent,* 19.

> civilised man felt as if struck by the electric spark of that same civilization, as they had not only treated us hospitably but very generously.[9]

At this point, the speech takes a radical turn. The arrogant and pompous voice of the conqueror now gives way to the sober tone of the statesman, who enlightens the audience with the country's inexhaustible resources waiting to be harvested by civilised hands: innumerable agricultural products; abundant gold, silver and emeralds; and thousands of "savage Indians" which could be easily "attracted to civilisation", hence transformed in productive labour for the future enterprises established there. The exhaustive report, adorned with statistics and promising ventures, closes with the General's Faustian project: a colossal navigation system connecting the South American republics of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela and the Guianas through the immense waterway formed by the Amazon and its tributaries. This system was to link with another grand scheme –the Inter-Continental railway running from New York to Buenos Aires- hence allowing the aforesaid countries and "humanity in general" to take advantage of "the 4,000,000 square miles which the Amazon region contains and which it may be said is in its entirely uncultivated and uninhabited and consequently merely vacant land".[10]

He and his brothers, Reyes concluded, had significantly contributed to this ecumenical enterprise. They had explored the Amazon and many of its tributaries, "discovered" and established steam navigation in some of them, "civilised" the "savage cannibals" that "formerly wandered" in the forests, and built trails linking the Putumayo lowlands with the Andes mountains. Sadly, the "conquests" they had won for the "progress and civilisation" of their mother country and humanity, the General announced to the public, took a dire toll. During the years they spent in the rivers and jungles of the Putumayo, two of his brothers perished. Enrique would succumb to "malignant fever", while Nestor was "devoured by the cannibals of the Putumayo".

[9] Reyes, *Across the South American Continent,* 19-20.
[10] Reyes, *Across the South American Continent,* 30.

Rafael Reyes, 1913 (Source: Library of Congress).

When Reyes had concluded his passionate speech, the audience, declares the reporter in flamboyant rhetoric, "galvanized with surprise by what they had listened to, with the delight of an exquisite satisfaction, by the contemplation of the very gorgeous panorama which the inspired narrator had unveiled before their sight, just as a magician exhibits before his public a series of enchanted palaces and gardens peopled by fairies and legendary genii".[11] A commission was appointed to verify the veracity of Reyes' account, and following its positive verdict the delegates unanimously made an appeal for "collective action". The Putumayo explorer would be the object of numerous manifestations of gratitude, appointed as honorary member of the Mexican geographical society, and his work, acclaimed as the "base of a new geography", published in Spanish, English, German, and French. The Assembly agreed to schedule a conference at Rio de Janeiro in a year's time to discuss his proposal, and issued a plaque in honour of the deceased brothers with the

[11] Reyes, *Across the South American Continent,* 6.

inscription: “in memory of Nestor and Enrique who died in the service of the civilization of America”.[12]

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We have no record that the Rio conference ever took place and throughout that year Reyes was in any case busy campaigning for the presidency of Colombia, to which he was elected in December 1903. Furthermore, it seems that the General’s project was not accepted unanimously by the delegates, and it would have raised “disgusts and rancours” regarding its tacit acquiescence with the US imperialist interests in the Continent.[13] The project, however, would be resuscitated sporadically on future occasions, although to date the initiatives have largely remained on paper. Its most recent revival has been under the IIRSA, a massive continental initiative launched in 2000, which contemplates infrastructure development at multiple levels (transport, energy, telecommunications) aimed to enhance the physical and economic integration between the region’s countries. The initiative includes the development of a multi-nodal transportation scheme, whose chief purpose is to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans through Brazil and Colombia. The scheme’s main components -the improvement of navigation along the Amazon and Putumayo Rivers and the construction of the Pasto-Mocoa road,[14] vividly evoke Reyes’ dream.

A few years ago, on December 14th 2005, on the occasion of an official visit by the Brazilian president Lula da Silva, the then Colombian president Alvaro Uribe took his colleague to a Presidential Palace where there is a portrait of Reyes. Once there, he narrated to Lula the General’s epic adventure in the Putumayo and Brazil, and commented how this “visionary” and “achiever” president was the precursor of the IIRSA. For -he informed Lula- Reyes had once “put the saddle on his mule” and “uprooting the forests” reached the plains of the Putumayo, and from there the Amazon, the Atlantic Ocean and finally Rio de Janeiro.

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[12] Reyes, *Across the South American Continent,* 11.

[13] Carlos Marichal, *México y las Conferencias Panamericanas 1889-1938* (Ciudad de México: Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2002), 59.

[14] The Pasto-Mocoa road, considered the “anchor project” of the whole scheme, comprises the improvement of the existing road and the construction of a new 47 km section between the towns of Mocoa and San Francisco. This project will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The episode, narrated in a speech made by Uribe later that day during a lunch in Lula's honour, served to inform publicly about the important steps that Colombia had taken towards regional integration. The Colombian government, noted Uribe, had undertaken enormous efforts to fulfil Reyes' dream, and he was pleased to announce that the bid to build the Pasto-Mocoa road, "one of the Continent's major roads", was soon to be opened. "How good, President!" -Uribe effusively addressed Lula-, "that in the course of a few months we see this road project awarded and its construction initiated, because this would be the beginning of a great dream".[15]

Despite such promising words, when Uribe's presidential term came to an end -five years after he met Lula in Bogotá-, not a single kilometre of road had been built. The many problems, conflicts and delays faced by the project, on the other hand, form part of the intricate history of the project to be addressed in a later chapter. What is of interest here and I would like to emphasise, was the reincarnation of Reyes' dream a century later in the figure of Uribe. The immutable nature of this dream, I suggest, lay not so much in the sort of projects it aspired to, but in the particular rhetoric in which the dream was rooted. In Uribe's speech, we find no mention of cannibal Indians such as those that "devoured" Reyes' younger brother; neither are the Putumayo forests portrayed as unknown lands untouched by civilisation; nor did the speaker captivate the audience with his own delusions of conquest and grandeur. Yet the road, identical to Reyes' navigation plan, is assumed by Uribe as a "colossal project" aimed to *transform* a "backward" and "isolated" landscape into a modern space of inter-oceanic highways and development hubs. As in Reyes' Putumayo, the region's backwardness strikingly contrasts with the inexhaustible resources it encloses; and, although the indigenous peoples are not deemed cannibals anymore, they too –along with guerrilla and other outlaw characters "hiding" in the forests- are seen as an obstacle for progress and development. Against this landscape, the project itself, far from being a caprice of the megalomaniac explorer or the statesman "obsessed with progress" –as Uribe himself depicted Reyes-, appeared to embody the civilising mission of the state.

[15] "Discurso de Alvaro Uribe Vélez durante el Almuerzo ofrecido en honor al presidente de Brasil Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva," Álvaro Uribe Vélez, accessed September 5, 2011, http://www.presidencia.gov.co/prensa_new/sne/2005/diciembre/14/12142005.htm

We could cite many contemporary examples of this rhetoric in government, development, media, and even academic discourses and representations of the vast territories lying outside the "control of the state", often pictured as a no man's land inhabited by terrorists, drug traffickers and a wide variety of lawless characters.[16] An analysis of the temporal and spatial mutations of discourse in which those territories and its inhabitants are embedded is beyond the scope of this work.[17] The point I would like to highlight here is how this rhetorical construction, which has historically opposed the idea of "civilisation" to "savagery", "progress" to "backwardness" or "centre" to "periphery", directly alludes to one of the central axioms in which the project of the state is founded and sustained.

This chapter seeks to explore the emergence of this rhetoric in the specific context of nineteenth century Colombia. As will be briefly described in the first section, its origins can be traced back to the early times of the Spanish rule, a story that broadly mirrors the ways in which the colonial spaces and populations where discursively assimilated and appropriated by the coloniser. However, and since the chapter's main objective is to show how this particular rhetoric became a central feature within the foundational myth of the postcolonial nation-state, the analysis centres for the most part on the period in question. Moreover, the ways in which it surfaced, as will be illustrated in the second section, is inexorably linked to the post-independence quest for the geographical integration of the country, a quest which finds its major correlation in the dismal picture of the newly born republic as a mosaic of isolated, empty, and autarkic regions. Within this order of things, state-making would mostly be conceived as a teleological process through which the state would gradually but inexorably expand over and absorb hostile or stateless territories and populations. It was precisely in this context that the image of the frontier, conceived as "marginal" or "peripheral" spaces lying beyond civilisation, would begin to emerge as a central element within this myth. In other words, and as we witness in Reyes' "magician" act performed at the Pan-American Conference, "state" and "frontier" became part of a

[16] For a detailed analysis of this rhetoric in the contemporary context of the Putumayo see Ramírez, *Between the guerrillas and the state* …

[17] As noted in the introduction, the the most comprehensive analysis of the historical origins and evolution of this rhetoric can be found in Serje, *El revés de la nación* …

same rhetorical construction, the former's aura of authority and legitimacy built upon the "savagery" and "barbarism" of the latter.

It is important to emphasise that a historical analysis of the rhetoric in question necessarily involves a wide array of characters and representational forms, some of which will be considered throughout the chapter. However, the analysis will revolve primarily around the figure of Rafael Reyes. The relevance this historical character has for the arguments pursued here is based upon several aspects, although there are three main reasons worth mentioning. The first one is related to the theoretical approach of this work, which contrary to traditional views of the state as an abstract construction, focuses on the multiple material and discursive practices in which it is embedded. Secondly, as will be argued in the third section, the many facets embodied by this single character are crucial to understand the specific historical process through which the Putumayo frontier entered into the narratives and practices of state-making. Finally, as the story of the road begins to a large degree with Reyes, this chapter constitutes in many ways a preamble or "context" without which it is hardly possible to grasp not only the story itself, but the broader historical and spatial context in which it has unfolded since its beginnings up to the present day.

Two frontiers

The vast region extending from the east of the southern Colombian Andes to the Pacific Ocean that Reyes depicted as "completely unknown" and which roughly alluded to the Putumayo and Caquetá basins, was far from being *terra incognita* by the time he first set foot there. At that time –early 1870s-, the territory where he and his brothers spent several years devoted to the extraction of cinchona bark had for a while been incorporated into the country's territorial jurisdiction. This region, known today as the Department of Putumayo, was then part of the *Territorio del Caquetá*, an extensive province established in 1845 which had as its capital the tiny settlement of Mocoa, seat of the *Prefecto* (prefect), a priest and a few "whites" engaged in different extractive activities. The *Territorio del Caquetá* had been surveyed and mapped in 1857 by the Chorographic Commission led by the Italian engineer and geographer Agustín Codazzi. However, for most of the nineteenth century it remained

largely neglected by the central government, as it was deemed to be a peripheral region of little political and economic interest for the country. Furthermore, the dramatic description that Reyes made of his crossing of the *cordillera* certainly constituted a common source of distress and torment not only for the nineteenth century Colombian "pioneers" and the few government officers stuck in remote and isolated outposts. During most of the three centuries of colonial rule, although the region would be widely penetrated by missionaries, *encomenderos*[18] and colonial officers -not to mention the early expeditions in the search of *El Dorado*-, the Andes always represented a major barrier for the Spanish colonisers.[19]

The Spanish foundations between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in the Putumayo region, which were largely restricted to Mission towns, are characterised by their ephemeral and tenuous existence. The case of Mocoa is in many ways exemplary of the colonial process of occupation of the Amazon. Considered to be the earliest Spanish settlement in the Colombian Amazon, it was originally founded around 1557 on a small valley in the Andean Amazon piedmont, and named after the indigenous group inhabiting the area. Apparently, the initial settlement soon disappeared, for it was re-founded in 1563, the year that was regarded subsequently as its official founding date.[20] The Mocoas and other indigenous communities inhabiting the surrounding area would soon be subjected to the colonial system of *encomiendas*.[21] For instance, as early as 1582, the Agustin friar Jerónimo de Escobar mentions that Mocoa had currently 800 indigenous divided into ten encomiendas. The same friar, however, noted that the city had a "bleak future" since the communication with the rest of the provincial government was very precarious, and for this reason it was "practically isolated". Apparently, during that same year Mocoa was destroyed by the Andanquí Indians, to be reconstructed only decades later by the Jesuit

[18] Grantees of Indians under the system of *encomiendas* (see note 21).
[19] This situation was to a large extent shared among the Spanish territories across the Andes from Colombia to Bolivia. See Victor Belaúnde, "The Frontier in Hispanic America", in Weber and Rausch, *Where Cultures Meet,* 33-41 (Wilmington, DE: Jaguar Books, 1994), 37.
[20] For an account of the different foundations of Mocoa throughout the colonial period see Julio Mora, *Mocoa. Su historia y desarrollo* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1997), 44-46.
[21] The *encomienda* was, in broad terms, a system of tribute extraction under the form of labour established by the Spanish crown in America. In the case of Mocoa, the establishment of *encomiendas* was directly associated with the development of gold mining in its surroundings throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See Ramírez, *Frontera fluida,* 80-81.

missionaries. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the city would be again in ruins, the number of tributary indigenous having been reduced to 75, and of the initial ten encomiendas only two would remain.[22] During the eighteenth century, Mocoa would continue being the target of attacks on the part of the indigenous and for this reason abandoned and relocated in more than one occasion. The decline of the missionary work in Putumayo would reach its peak in 1784, the year when the Franciscans abandoned their Mission towns. According to Llanos and Pineda, the overall balance of the Franciscan missionary work in Putumayo was negative, and "the colonisation through the missionary regime had failed".[23]

The failure of the colonial policy of occupation of the Amazon through catholic Missions does not mean that the Missions left no impact on the natives. The most visible one was likely to be the demographic decline caused by smallpox and other diseases brought by the European colonisers and, at a more general level, the violence embedded in the colonial crusade. For instance, the recurrent rebellions against the friars and the destruction of Mission towns have been frequently attributed to the violent practices through which these intended to "reduce" the Indians to "civilised life".[24] Still, the chances that the Amazon indigenous peoples had to escape or avoid contact with the colonisers were considerably greater than for those inhabiting places under tighter control by the Spanish authorities. Certainly, not only the vastness and difficulties of access made of the missionary work in the Amazon lowlands a truly titanic enterprise; those friars devoting their lives to wandering the Amazon forests chasing "unfaithful Indians" often perished under the inclement climate or were killed in indigenous revolts. The hopeless description that Fray Jerónimo de Escobar makes of Mocoa in 1582 is telling in this regard:

> This town is next to the mountains, far away from the road, so that it is a great travail to enter. Said town of Agreda [Mocoa] is not growing. Instead, it scares people away. There is no way to communicate and with the gold being extracted there, which can reach

[22] Hector Llanos and Roberto Pineda, *Etnohistoria del gran Caquetá* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1982), 19-20.
[23] Llanos and Pineda, *Etnohistoria,* 33.
[24] Llanos and Pineda, *Etnohistoria,* 37-42.

> twenty-three-carat-gold worth some ten thousand pesos annually, with this they live and have a priest and a clerk, everyone having a miserable life.[25]

The difficulties of access, together with the resistance of the Indians, the unhealthy weather and the lack of economic support by the Crown, largely explains why the missionary action in the Amazon ended up being confined to the uppermost parts of the Putumayo and Caquetá basins.[26] Mocoa, despite its multiple resettlements and changes in name, and unlike the more eastern colonial outposts in the Amazon lowlands, would endure after three centuries of Spanish rule. However, its physical location in the Andean foothills -a transition zone between the Andes and Amazon regions- would come to symbolise a frontier between "civilisation" and "savagery", and the abrupt trials connecting these regions metaphorically pictured as dreadful paths isolating rather than linking the two. Few descriptions embody this image so faithfully as this literary description of the ancient Pasto-Mocoa trail made by a Capuchin friar at the beginning of the twentieth century:

> A nearly insurmountable barrier of the highest of mountains separated this vast land from Colombia. If an adventurer or a zealous missionary decided to overcome the obstacles that nature had in store, it was with great sacrifice and sometimes even endangering his own life. The road that communicated these savage lands to civilisation was the most original and horrendous thing one could ever imagine; one would say that some malignant spirit had delighted in distributing precipices and abysses in order to block the entry to this solitary place, where savagery was rampant.[27]

The Dantean experience that the missionary makes of the descent of the cordillera never seems to have existed among the aboriginal inhabitants of Putumayo. Ramírez has used the term "fluid frontier" in order to allude to the rich cultural and economic exchange which since pre-Columbian times has existed between the different indigenous groups inhabiting the Andes highlands, the *piedemonte* (the Andean foothills), and the *selva* (the Amazon forests).[28] Unlike the European colonisers, for whom the piedemonte always represented a physical and imaginary barrier, the author illustrates how for the indigenous peoples this region has historically served as an articulation zone between the highlands and the

[25] As quoted by Ramírez, *Frontera fluida,* 129.
[26] Gómez, *Putumayo*, 110.
[27] Gaspar De Pinell, and Canet Del Mar, *Relaciones interesantes y datos históricos sobre las misiones católicas el Caquetá y Putumayo desde el año 1632 hasta el presente* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1924), 19.
[28] Ramírez, *Frontera fluida...*

lowlands. Mocoa, rather than the isolated town portrayed by Jerónimo de Escobar, constituted a central crossroads where most of the indigenous trails converged. Apart from the mentioned path from Mocoa to the city of Pasto (described by the Capuchin friar and which constituted the "opening act" of Reyes' presentation at the Mexico Conference), there were other three main exchange routes which together comprised a complex exchange circuit connecting the Putumayo and Caquetá lowlands and piedemonte with the Andean region (see map 3).

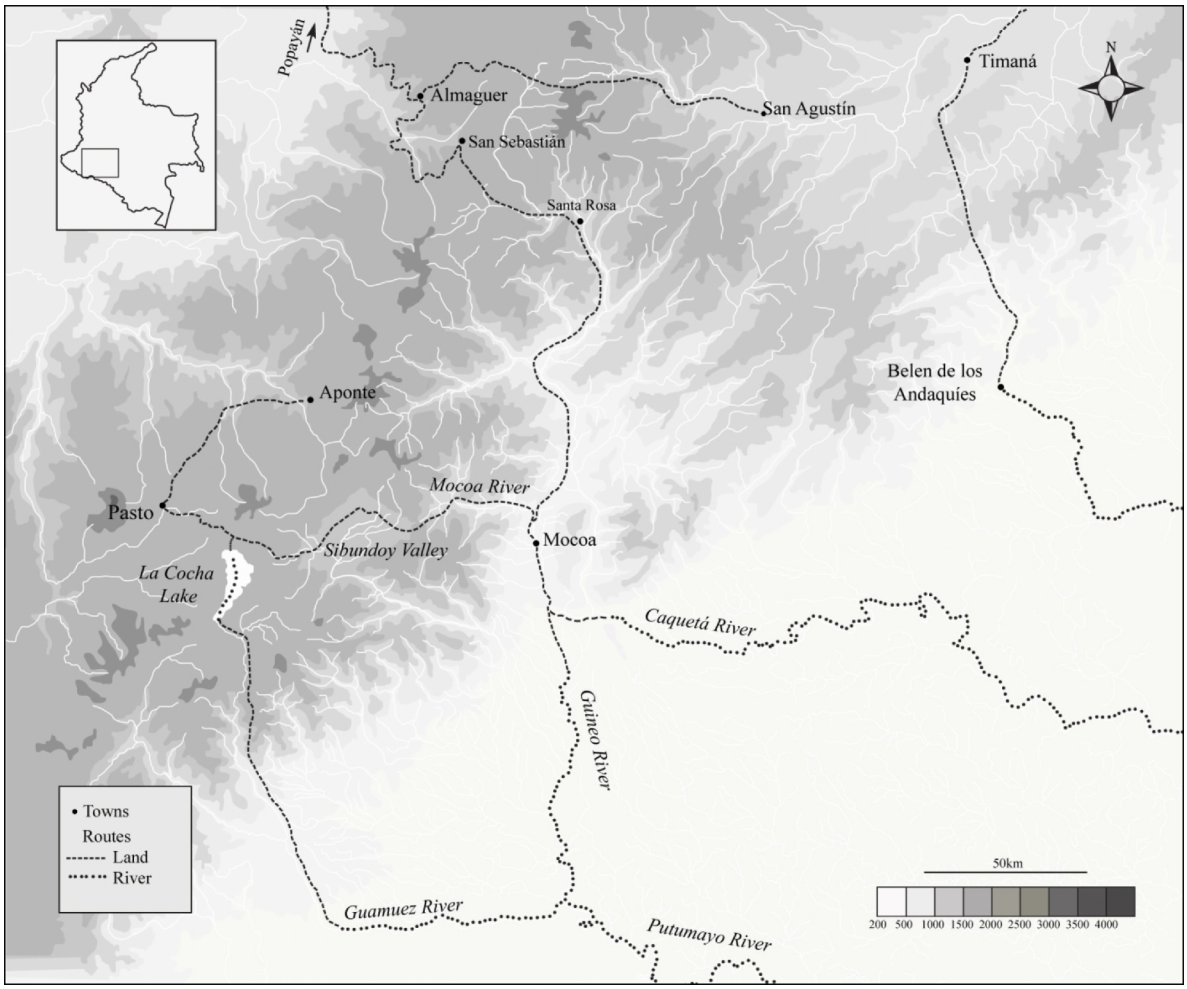
The indigenous groups of the piedemonte, and particularly the Quechua-speaking Ingas, had since pre-Hispanic times been specialised tradesmen. Products of the selva and the piedemonte such as dried fish, feathers, alluvial gold, bushmeat and wood resins, would be traded in the highlands for salt, tools, dogs and cotton. Although this exchange would continue to exist throughout the colonial period and well into the nineteenth century, it was altered and transformed in different ways with the arrival of the Spaniards.[29] The ancient paths were gradually integrated to the colonial and early republican exchange networks, and the indigenous peoples widely used as *silleros* (human carriers) not only for food and other products but for the missionaries, encomenderos, merchants, and other "white" travellers.[30] Still, this new order was subverted in different ways, for not only the traditional exchange persisted among the indigenous peoples but it also facilitated the establishment of alliances against the foreign conquerors. Moreover, the intricate system of trails and paths allowed the development of smuggling routes, a trade in which the

[29] The history of pre-Hispanic, colonial, and early republican exchange routes between the Colombian Andes and the Amazon constitutes a relatively well documented topic. See, for example: Augusto Gómez, "Bienes, rutas y mercados (siglos XV-XIX). Las relaciones de intercambio entre las tierras bajas de la Amazonia y las tierras altas de los Andes", *Revista de Antropología y Arqueología*, vol.IX, nos. 1-2, (1996): 51-80; Ramírez, *Frontera fluida,…*; Maria Victoria Uribe, "Caminos de los Andes del Sur"…; Maria Clemencia Ramírez and Beatriz Alzate, "Por el Valle de Atriz a Ecija de Sucumbíos", in Useche, *Caminos Reales de Colombia…*; Augusto Gómez and Camilo Domínguez, "Quinerías y caucherías de la Amazonia. Caminos y varaderos de la Amazonia", in Useche, *Caminos Reales de Colombia...*; Maria Victoria Uribe, "Pastos y protopastos: la red regional de intercambio de productos y materias primas de los siglos X a XVI D.C.", *Revista Maguaré* vol.3, Bogotá, (1986): 33-43.

[30] As noted by Ramírez, although the overload of human carriers was condemned by law as early as 1542, the custom of travelling on the back of the indigenous peoples continued to be a common practice until well into the twentieth century. Ramírez, *Frontera fluida,* 109; see also: Victor Bonilla, *Servants of God or masters of men? The story of a Capuchin mission in Amazonia* (London: Penguin, 1972), 137. For a discussion on the practice of silleros in the broader context of colonialism see Taussig, *Shamanism*, 287-335.

indigenous from the piedemonte took an active part. Such was the case of the Pasto-Mocoa trail, whose closure would be ordered in 1751 to suppress the illicit trade of clothes that the Portuguese introduced by river to the upper Putumayo, and which the Sibundoy Indians carried on their backs for about ten days from there to the city of Pasto.[31]

Map 3. Indigenous exchange routes of the *piedemonte* c.XVI-XIX[32]



Through the persistence of traditional forms of exchange, the indigenous "fluid frontier" survived side by side with a colonial spatial order in which the Andes and the Amazon appeared as two fundamentally opposed worlds. Yet, amidst the conqueror's frontier

[31] Taussig, *Shamanism*, 103.

[32] Elaborated by the autor, based on Ramírez, *Frontera fluida…*; Maria Victoria Uribe, "Caminos de los Andes del Sur. Los caminos del sur del Cauca y Nariño", in *Caminos Reales de Colombia*, edited by Mariano Useche, (Bogotá: Fondo FEN, 1995).

between civilisation and savagery so astonishingly imprinted on the precipitous and abstruse topography of the *cordillera* and the vertically integrated landscape of the conquered, lay an insurmountable abyss. This dichotomous order would inevitably clash with the republican ideal of spatial and social integration in which the project of the nation state is founded. Still, and paradoxically, as we shall see in the following section, it would be not in the annihilation of this order but on its own perpetuation that the power of the state was to be erected and sustained.

The "base of a new geography"

From the departure of the catholic Missions in the last quarter of the seventeenth century until the creation of the *Territorio del Caquetá* in 1845, the extensive region known today as *Amazonia* (Colombian Amazon), remained practically isolated from the rest of the country.[33] Not only was this region considered of little political or economic interest, but the newly born republic concentrated its meagre fiscal resources in the most densely populated areas of the interior valleys and highlands. Even the interior or central provinces were largely isolated from each other, a situation with would persist throughout whole century and redounded in the prevalent view of nineteenth century Colombia as an "archipelago" of a few populated centres separated by vast "empty" territories.[34] The Magdalena River, which runs across the country from south to north and flows into the Atlantic, constituted the principal transport axis and the main export and import route. However, even after the introduction of steam transport around mid-century, the journey from the Caribbean coast to Bogotá could take up to a month of river navigation, plus another five or six days by foot or mule to cover step trail from the port city of Honda – where the navigation of the Magdalena was interrupted by rapids- to the capital. The Honda-Bogotá trail, although recurrently described by travellers to illustrate the arduous conditions of transport across the country, was in much better condition than the other routes connecting the Magdalena with the central and eastern provinces. Moreover, the

[33] The area of the Colombian Amazon, which amounts to 413.473 km2 distributed in seven provinces, corresponds roughly to a third of the country's total area.
[34] Jorge Orlando Melo, "La evolución económica de Colombia, 1830-1900", *Manual de Historia de Colombia*, Vol.II, 133-207, (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1986), 151.

development of transport infrastructure throughout the nineteenth century did little to ameliorate this situation. Whilst the road network hardly improved during this period, the boom of railroad construction since the 1870s would essentially consist of short and unconnected lines aimed at reaching the Magdalena's ports. This logic is largely explained by the fact that almost all the railroads were designed to increase external trade rather than enhancing the precarious internal transport network. In addition, many were controlled by foreign companies and served to supply the industrialised world with raw materials, thus reflecting the enclave nature of infrastructure development.[35]

If this landscape constituted the "civilised" side of the Republic, what would be the scenery of the extensive Amazon frontier? The lament of the Prefect of the *Territorio del Caquetá* in 1850 is significant in this respect: "never will this territory escape from its ancient pitiful state, unless the difficulties are overcome and whatever possible is done to construct good ways in order to make the communication with the adjacent provinces possible".[36] The Prefect's plea, as those from his future successors, would for several decades invariably end up occupying some dusty government archive in Bogotá. By the end of the century, the description by another Prefect of the Pasto-Mocoa trail would show how little the transport conditions had changed since colonial times: "The journey from Pasto to this city [Mocoa] is gruelling, often bumping into horrifying places. Those of thin build travel on the back Indians in a ridiculous, extravagant, and painful position: fastened with bale-rope and tied like pigs".[37]

The neglect of the Amazon region by the central government would also be felt in the abandonment of the borders with the neighbouring countries. The reports of indigenous slave trade along the Caquetá and Putumayo rivers, a practice which dated back to the seventeenth century and was largely carried out by Portuguese merchants, were frequent

[35] Hernán Horna, "Transportation modernization and entrepreneurship in nineteenth century Colombia", *Journal of Latin American Studies,* vol.14 no.1 (1982): 52; also Bushnell, *The making of modern Colombia,* 134-135.
[36] "Informe del Prefecto del Caquetá al Secretario de Gobierno". Mocoa, February 7th, 1850. As quoted by Gomez, *Putumayo*, 64.
[37] "Informes del señor Prefecto Provincial de Caquetá al Secretario de Gobierno y comunicaciones. 1889-1890". As quoted by Gómez, *Putumayo*, 204.

throughout the nineteenth century.[38] However, the major repercussion of this neglect would be a series of long and intricate territorial disputes, mostly with Peru and Brazil, which resulted in the loss of an extensive strip of land between the Putumayo, Napo and Amazon rivers. The country's weak border policy over this century is partly attributed to the government's strategy of claiming its territorial rights on the basis of the *Uti possidetis iure* legal doctrine, or the principle through which the newly born republics would preserve the colonial limits at the time of the independence.[39] However, not only were the boundaries between the former colonies very confusing in regions such as the Amazon, thus facilitating the *de facto* appropriation of territories in dispute, but the practical measures of successive Colombian governments to safeguard its borders were negligible throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, a situation mirroring the state's blind faith on the *Uti possidetis iure* principle.[40]

As early as the 1890s, when the extraction of rubber was just beginning to emerge in the Colombian Amazon, the consular agents in the Amazon cities of Iquitos, Manaus and Belém continually warned the government of the regular incursions into national territory by Peruvian and Brazilian "caucheros" (rubber tappers). The complaint of the Colombian Consul in Belém to the Minister of Foreign Relations in 1894 epitomises the drama of the borders: "From the three rivers Napo, Putumayo and Caquetá large quantities of rubber and many other natural products are currently being extracted enriching other countries...this is so because, sadly, Colombia lacks there any presence of authorities able to guarantee her territorial domains. With all due respect, I cannot comprehend the attitude of this government which looks with such unreasonable indifference to such precious national interests".[41]

[38] Llanos and Pineda, *Etnohistoria,* 64-68, 81-84; Pineda, "Vorágine", 149-151.
[39] Although the *Uti possidetis iure* principle would be the subject of subsequent disputes, its adoption following the end of the Spanish rule had the main purpose of preventing fratricidal struggles amongst the independent states.
[40] Zárate, *Silvícolas,* 188; Palacio, *Fiebre,* 133-142.
[41] Informe del cónsul de Belém enviado al Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores. Belém del Pará, June 12th, 1894. AGN, Archivo diplomático y consular-MRE, Box 127, Folder 277, fols.7-8.

Against this grim picture of the "desiertos orientales" (eastern deserts) –as the Amazon frontier was often referred to in the nineteenth century-, it comes as little surprise that the common reference that this region would integrate first to the world economy through the successive extractive cycles such as cinchona and rubber, than to the nation state.[42] Even nowadays the older *Mocoanos*[43] invoke memories of the rubber boom times, around the dawn of the twentieth century, when the circulating currency was the sterling pound and European biscuits and pastries were available at the local market for those who could afford them. Not long afterwards, when Rafael Reyes had resigned from the presidency of Colombia and was exiled in Europe writing a memoir about his youth to his sons, he opened the chapter on the Putumayo with the following words:

> In Pasto the region that extends to the east was known only as far as Mocoa, and beyond there the populace, ignorant of geography, thought it was Portugal; they confused this country with Brazil. Those forests were populated by monsters and terrible beasts, something alike the unknown and fantastic world which must have been for humanity the seas and regions that Columbus discovered.[44]

The revealing nature of Reyes' statement lies not so much in his judgement about Colombians' rampant ignorance –which was by no means restricted to the "populace"- of the country's peripheral regions, but how this ignorance was superseded by all kinds of fantastic imageries. Through these imageries, those peripheral spaces such as the *Territorio del Caquetá* would be incorporated into the *imaginary order* of the nation long before they were to be *physically* integrated to the *spatial order* of the state. These two apparently dissociated processes, however, were inexorably connected, since the ways in which this spatial order was erected can only be understood by first addressing the logic behind the construction of this imaginary order.

[42] Domínguez, *Amazonia Colombiana,* 17; Gómez, *Putumayo*, 20; Zárate, *Silvícolas,* 71.
[43] Gentilic for the inhabitants of Mocoa.
[44] Reyes, *Memorias,* 109.

Creole pioneers

Benedict Anderson has used the expression "creole pioneers" in order to account for the early rise of nationalism in Latin America, a process which was marked by the emergence and proliferation of independence movements across the continent since the late eighteenth century. According to Anderson, the two factors commonly cited to explain the development of these movements –the spread of Enlightenment ideas together with the tightening of the Spanish control over its colonies during the second half of that century-, although central to understanding their origins and evolution, do not themselves explain how they became "emotionally plausible and politically viable".[45] A more thorough explanation, suggests the author, must be sought in the articulation of two different yet related factors. First, the fact that the Spanish administrative units, whose original shape derived from arbitrary or fortuitous circumstances, developed over time as isolated and self-containing units. This self-contained character, which to a large extent resulted from the Spanish policies of turning the administrative units into separated economic zones, was reinforced by geographical factors, in several cases translated into physical barriers and immense difficulties of communication between the colonies. This situation helped explain why the independent states were initially created according to the colonial territorial jurisdictions, as reflected by the adoption of the *Uti possidetis iure* principle. However, according to Anderson, the autarkic nature of the colonial territories alone does not account for the sort of attachments that made possible the transition from those administrative units into independent nation states. The origins of those attachments and their materialisation into nationalist movements have instead to be sought for in the political and economic exclusion faced by the creole society.[46] This exclusion, partly associated with the racial stigmas of being born outside the Metropolis, entailed a crucial dilemma out of which the creoles found a common ground of identity against the Spanish-born Spaniards: for if

[45] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism* (London & New York: Verso, 2006), 51-52.

[46] The term *creole* (from the Spanish *criollo*), alludes to the name which was originally given to all the descendants of Spaniards born in America.

"born in the Americas, he [the creole] could not be a true Spaniard; ergo, born in Spain, the *peninsular* could not be a true American".[47]

Anderson's argument on the Creole pioneers provides a good summary of the process through which, thanks to series of interrelated factors –geographical, economic, social- the Spanish territories in America gradually evolved to independent nation states or "imagined communities". However, this argument does not account for the ways in which those communities were actually *imagined,* and how through this new imaginary order we find not the culmination of colonial forms of domination and control but their own perpetuation. Pratt has clearly elucidated this point when she notes that "politically and ideologically, the liberal creole project involved founding an independent, decolonised American society and culture, while retaining European values and white supremacy".[48] This is not the place to discuss the multiple and contradictory ways in which nationalism in Colombia or Latin America in general became deeply entangled with western ideologies of race and class, and how those ideologies translated into a myriad forms of political, social, economic and spatial exclusion.[49] Still, there are two aspects which I would like to stress, as they are central to the argument presented here. First, it is by acknowledging the rooted nature of those ideologies in the imaginary order of the nation that we can fully grasp the colonial logic in which this order was and is still embedded. Secondly, it is by looking at how within this same order the idea of *race* became inexorably attached to *space,* that it is possible to understand the ways in which the post-independence ideal of social and spatial integration was conceived and put into practice.

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[47] Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 58.

[48] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel writing and transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 125.

[49] On the particular issue of race and nationalism in Latin America see: Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making. Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes, 1810-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Peter Wade *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997); Nancy Stepan, *The hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Some bibliographical references on this subject for Colombia include: Peter Wade, "The Language of race, place and nation in Colombia", *América Negra*, No. 2, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, (1989): 41-68; Peter Wade, *Blackness and race mixture: The dynamics of racial identity in Colombia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Frank Safford, "Race, integration, and progress: elite attitudes and the Indian in Colombia, 1750-1870", *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol.71 no.1, (1991): 1-33.

One of the best illustrations of how this creole imaginary order was conceived is the early assessment of the country's geographical knowledge made by the independence martyr Francisco José de Caldas. In an article published in 1808 in the *Semanario del Nuevo Reino de Granada* -the main scientific journal at the time- Caldas, also considered to be the father of Colombian geography, made an urgent appeal for the need to overcome the absolute ignorance regarding the country's geography. The self-taught geographer and astronomer summarised this state of affairs in the following words:

> Let's take our gaze to the north, let's take it to the south, let's register the most populous parts or the deserts of this Colony: everywhere we find nothing but the stamp of sloth and ignorance. Our rivers and mountains are unknown to us; we ignore the extension of the country in which we were born, and our geography is still in its cradle.[50]

In the same writing, however, Caldas elaborated a basic classification of the country's population, which he broadly divided into "savages" and "civilised". By the former he specifically meant the "wandering" and "barbarian" indigenous tribes inhabiting the vast peripheral forests, savannahs, and deserts. The latter, comprising those living under the "laws of society", were subdivided in three differentiates "races": the "civilised Indians", the "Africans" introduced –as slaves- after the discovery of the "New World", and the "European conquerors". This last category included a further clarification, as Caldas emphasised that by "Europeans" he meant "not only those who were born in that part of the world, but also their sons, who preserving the purity of their origin, have never mixed with the other castes".[51] This group explicitly referred to the creoles, the caste to which Caldas proudly belonged, and of which he stated that represented "the nobility of the Continent".

Caldas' hierarchical ordering of the country's inhabitants was not restricted to their racial origins, and to a large extent reproduced the prevailing environmental determinism that dominated Western thinking and underpinned nineteenth century scientific racism. Caldas had elsewhere written about the influence of climate on the country's races, taking into

[50] Francisco José de Caldas, "Estado de la geografía del Virreinato de Santafé de Bogotá, con relación a la economía y comercio", *Obras completas de Francisco José de Caldas*, 183-211 (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Imprenta Nacional, 1966 [1808]), 208.
[51] Caldas, *Estado,* 188.

consideration a wide range of variables such as atmospheric pressure, temperature, electric charge, wind, rain, and altitude.[52] However, and despite the racial variances and moral virtues and vices stemming from these variables, a geographical division of the country in two broad zones prevailed throughout the text: the temperate regions –predominantly the populated areas of the Andean mountains-, whose mild climate was directly associated to the "industrious" and "intelligent" character of their inhabitants; and the hot and humid regions of the selvas and coasts, the "natural" habitat of the "savages" and whose "scorching" heat and excessive humidity condemned humans to a perpetual state of "barbarity", "laziness", and "backwardness".

This dichotomous order, whose origins hark back to colonial times, has to a large extent persisted into the present, assuming over time different expressions such as "highlands" versus "lowlands" or *tierras frías* (temperate lands) versus *tierras calientes* (hot lands).[53] However, the fundamental significance of this order is not its perpetuation itself, but how it acquired a *hegemonic* character through which space became *racialised* or –conversely- race became *spatialised*. The hegemonic nature of this order, as noted by Wade, lies not in the fact that it is uncontested, but in how its principles came to appear as self-evident truths, truths whose appearance of reality cannot be detached from the power relations in which they are sustained.[54] It is in this sense that one can easily appreciate the role played by the creole elite -among which Caldas figured as one of the most prominent characters- as a class of *organic intellectuals* in the Gramscian sense, or a class whose function is "conceived as absolute and pre-eminent, and their historical existence and dignity abstractly rationalized".[55]

[52] Francisco José de Caldas, "Del influjo del clima sobre los seres organizados", in Caldas, *Obras Completas,* 79-120.
[53] Palacio, *Fiebre,* 50-52; Serje, *El revés,* 300-301.
[54] Wade, "The Language", 46.
[55] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 117.

Caldas utterly embodied this intellectual function, as he captured the pre-eminent role of science and particularly geography within the creole state project.[56] He condensed the essence of this role in his widely quoted statement that "geography is the fundamental base of all political speculation".[57] The transcendence of this statement has to be appreciated not only in the epistemological principles underlying geographical discourse, but predominantly in its *practical* implications and effects. For, if Caldas' hierarchical ordering of the country essentially opposed the "civilised" environment of the temperate Andes to the untamed world of the selvas and savannahs, it also entailed a crucial paradox: not only the latter encompassed most of the country's territory but –and most significantly- they were imagined as an infinite container of natural resources waiting to be unveiled and harvested for the sake of "progress" and "civilisation'". Who were meant to carry forward this nationalistic enterprise? Naturally not the hordes of "savages" wandering in the jungles, whose state of "barbarism" was only surpassed by their "laziness" and total lack of entrepreneurship. Since the white races of the country –represented mostly by the creoles- comprised just a minority of its population, this task would ideally be accomplished with the aid of European immigration. Throughout the nineteenth century the central government attempted on various occasions, although unsuccessfully, to encourage foreign immigration through laws that offered land grants and other incentives to potential colonisers.[58]

It is not the purpose here to discuss why those attempts invariably failed. However, it is important to mention that the reasons were not only confined to local factors such as the government financial constraints, and "global" causes such as nineteenth century Europeans' fears regarding acclimatisation in tropical areas also explain an important part

[56] For a detailed discussion on the role of geographical discourse in the creole elite's project of nation state see Mauricio Nieto, *Orden natural y orden social. Ciencia y política en el Semanario del Nuevo Reyno de Granada* (Bogotá: Uniandes-CESO, 2008), 95-123; see also: Alfonso Múnera, *Fronteras imaginadas. La construcción de las razas y la geografía en el siglo XIX colombiano* (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 2005), 66-88.
[57] Caldas, "Estado", 183.
[58] A soon as 1823, a law (Law of 7th June, 1823) demanded local governors to support the settlement of foreigners in the "most advantageous lands". Years later, in 1847, the government sanctioned an Immigration Law (Law of June 2nd, 1847), which contemplated extensive benefits, and stated that the executive power could dispose of around two million hectares of "unoccupied lands" with the purpose of granting them to foreign immigrants.

of the picture.[59] The point I would like to highlight is how through these initiatives, and overall the creole elite's unrestricted faith in the white race's "enlightening" powers, the country's vast "peripheral" regions were proclaimed as "vacant" or "empty" lands waiting to be possessed. Caldas' desperate call for a meticulous and thorough survey of the country has to be understood precisely in this sense, for the question was not so much about the vital need to overcome the deplorable state in which the geographical knowledge of the country was plunged as how -and for whom- this knowledge was to be constructed.

Caldas' dream would take decades to be realised, but it finally did during the 1850s through the Chorographic Commission, a state sponsored project that is considered the single most important geographical event of the century in Colombia. The Chorographic Commission, of which Caldas is regarded as the precursor as well as being responsible for conceiving its "ideological foundations" and purposes,[60] consisted of a detailed survey and a geographical chart of each of the country's provinces. The contract signed between the government and the head of the Commission, the Italian military engineer and geographer Agustín Codazzi, clearly expressed the purpose of this colossal project: "[the descriptions and maps] must have the adequate extension, clarity, and precision, so that the country can be known and studied in all its dimensions, particularly in relation to topography, statistic and natural wealth".[61] Thus, the surveys and charts should gather an immense quantity of data which included inventories of vacant lands, natural resources and agricultural production; relations of existing trails and paths with distances and times of travel; location and commerce statistics of towns and villages; topographical descriptions of rivers, mountains, valleys, and forests; and descriptions of climates and populations. Not surprisingly, the issue of roads, which as noted previously, had represented since colonial times a nightmare for travellers, occupied a special place within the Commission's objectives. As noted by Sánchez, the fact that Codazzi was appointed as "roads engineer" instead of "geography

[59] I have elsewhere explored the issue of Europeans' acclimatisation in the tropics by discussing nineteenth century British travel narratives. Simón Uribe, "Constructing the tropics: nineteenth century British representations of Colombia", (MSc diss., London School of Economics, 2007).
[60] Efraín Sánchez, *Gobierno y geografía. Agustín Codazzi y la Comisión Corográfica de la Nueva Granada* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, El Ancora Editores, 1998), 69.
[61] As quoted by *Sánchez, Gobierno y geografía*, 239.

engineer" largely mirrored the consideration given to this subject by the national government.[62]

The precarious situation of the country's transport network, which the Chorographic Commission was expected to improve through the identification and projection of new routes, paradoxically constituted a considerable obstacle for the Commission itself, causing several delays in the works and torments to its members. Not unexpectedly, of the numerous expeditions carried out by Codazzi between 1850 and 1859 –the year of his death– none caused the Italian geographer so much suffering such as the forsaken *Territorio del Caquetá*. In his letter to the Secretary of State notifying the conclusion of the expedition to Caquetá, the restless engineer wrote: "I have happily left behind the Andaquíes [Caquetá] after having sketched the map of that extensive and unhealthy desert…I can assure the government that none of my expeditions has cost me so much money, nor have I suffered that many torments, neither have I seen myself, as I have on this occasion, so often exposed to die".[63]

The *Caquetá* expedition, carried out between January and April 1857, was confined –mostly due to the difficulties of access- to the upper Putumayo and Caquetá basins, and for this reason Codazzi mainly based his report on a series of written sources.[64] The opening lines of his description of the territory strikingly mirror the creole vision of the peripheral "deserts" and "selvas": "None of the ancient provinces in which the Nueva Granada[65] was divided" –wrote Codazzi- "can compare in dimension to the extensive Territorio del Caquetá; and yet, this territory is the most *deserted* and the *least inhabited* and known of the Republic".[66] The dichotomous rhetoric of the civilised world of the *cordillera* versus the

[62] *Sánchez, Gobierno y geografía*, 238.
[63] Camilo Domínguez, Augusto Gómez, and Guido Barona, eds., *Geografía física y política de la Confederación Granadina. Estado del Cauca, Territorio del Caquetá. Obra dirigida por el General Agustín Codazzi* (Bogotá: COAMA, FEN, IGAC, G. 1996), 237.
[64] These sources correspond to the accounts elaborated by José María Quintero -Prefect of Mocoa-, the Presbyter Manuel María Albis, and Pedro Mosquera –*Corregidor* (mayor) of Mesaya.
[65] Throughout the nineteenth century Colombia went through several names and territorial recompositions. From 1830 to 1856, it adopted the name of Nueva Granada.
[66] Domínguez et.al., *Geografía física y política*, 151 (emphasis added).

savage and yet boundless natural wealth of the selvas is continually reproduced throughout the text, as can be seen from this fragment that is worth quoting in full:

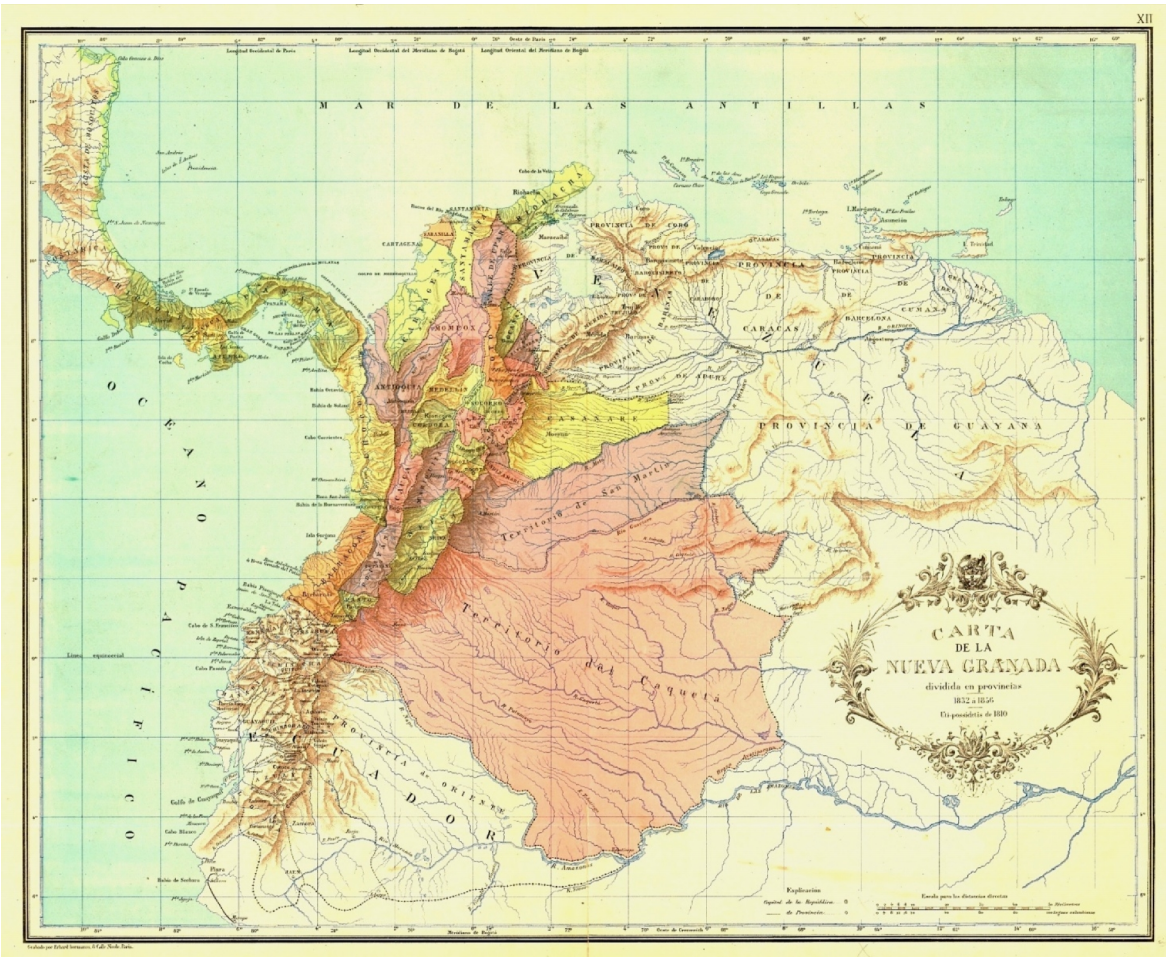
> There is no space on the ground which is not covered like a carpet by a diversity of plants. In the midst of such magnificent vegetation in which man has not had the least part, he almost finds himself like an imperceptible being in the middle of that vast land where everything is enormous: hills, plains, rivers and jungles. Upon seeing the gigantic development of the organic forces, of that overwhelming wealth, he realises that a numerous population is required to dominate such portentous vegetation. Time, long time, is needed for man to be able to exploit the immense wealth that the land offers in an incalculable profusion.[67]

The indigenous population, which Codazzi calculated as being 50,000 -most of them "savages"- was to him clearly insufficient to exploit the "overwhelming" wealth of the *Territorio del Caquetá*, and more so when he estimated that the whole territory –which comprised roughly half of the country's territory- could easily "contain" a population of 23 million (see map 4). Moreover, like Caldas, he was highly pessimistic of the natives' agency and endeavour. This was specially the case of the eastern parts of the territory, those which the colonial state was never able to control –let alone "civilise"-, and which, Codazzi judged, were still as "backward" as the world Columbus encountered. "[The savages] will make no progress" –he declared- "until the creoles get into close contact with them: otherwise they will never escape the state of barbarism in which they are born, live, and die, without knowing anything other than the satisfaction of their most vital needs to live brutally, almost like the beasts of the forest".[68] Yet, although Codazzi saw in climate the main obstacle for the white races' –both national and foreign- chances to take advantage of the abounding natural resources of *Caquetá*, he showed an unfettered faith in the transformative power of capitalist development. Thus, as with the "new geography" Reyes would outline decades later at the Pan-American Conference, the region Codazzi projected was one dominated by transoceanic steamship navigation, railways and roads. In this envisaged landscape, predicted Codazzi, the "pestilent" climates of the selvas would be

[67] Domínguez et.al., *Geografía física y política*, 197.
[68] Domínguez et.al., *Geografía física y política*, 194.

thoroughly modified as soon as a "numerous population" had "cut down the old trees of the forest, drained the marshlands and swamps and channelled the rivers...".[69]

Map 4. *Chart of the Nueva Granada, divided into provinces, 1832 to 1856, Uti possidetis of 1810* (*Territorio del Caquetá* shown in pink colour at the bottom of the map)[70]



Codazzi's description of the *Territorio del Caquetá* can hardly be reduced to a mere reproduction of nineteenth century racial and environmental determinist doctrines, and there is no question that his account of the territory, which along with a detailed geographical survey consisted of several maps and drawings as well as ethnographic and botanical descriptions, has great historiographical value. However, we have to locate this

[69] Domínguez et.al., *Geografía física y política*, 201.
[70] Agustín Codazzi, Manuel María Paz and Felipe Pérez, "Carta de la Nueva Granada dividida en provincias, 1832 a 1856. Uti possidetis de 1810", *Atlas geográfico e histórico de la República de Colombia* (Paris: A. Lahure, 1889).

singular event in the broader *discourse* –philosophical, scientific, political- through which the creole imaginary order of the nation emerged and gradually acquired a hegemonic character. Foucault's idea of discourse as a "field" where subjects are unevenly located or "a space of differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions"[71] is particularly enlightening in this respect. For, what we see in the colossal project of the Chorographic Commission is not only the generation of knowledge about the country, but its normalisation into an already established discursive field.

I want to place emphasis on this process of normalisation, since it is precisely here that we encounter one of the central axioms in which the foundational myth of the modern state is grounded. This myth, which harks back at least to the idea of the social contract that we find in Hobbes' *Leviathan,* stems from the philosophical fiction of the "state of nature" as the legitimisation of a supreme sovereign endowed with the power to impose security and peace among its subjects. Under the state of nature, Hobbes tells us, there is "no Society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short".[72] Reading Hobbes' *Laws of Nature* one cannot but think of the creole's chaotic vision of the country's jungles as a vast space infested with savages, whose existence is hardly differentiated from the "beasts of the forest". Once this vision has been embedded into the landscape through the erection of a hierarchical and racialized spatial order, the state *appears* as a sovereign force whose legitimate existence is sustained on its civilising character. State-making, accordingly, appears as a teleological process through which hostile territories and populations are gradually integrated into the civilised order of the state. Yet, this idea finds a major paradox on the same principle in which it is founded. For, if the illusion of legitimacy in which the power of the state ultimately rests lies on the binary opposition between "civilisation" and "savagery", doesn't this opposition need to be perpetuated so the illusion can be maintained? This actually constitutes an essential paradox that we encounter in the creole project of the state: a

[71] Michel Foucault, "Politics and the study of discourse", in *The Foucault effect. Studies in governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordona and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1991), 53-72, 58.
[72] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: J.M. Dent y Sons Ltd, 1937[1651]), 64-65.

project aimed at the social and spatial integration of the nation, and yet a project whose legitimacy is sustained on the perpetuation of the civilisation/savagery rhetoric in which it is founded.

It is also in this context that the idea of the frontier as a metaphor to designate those spaces lying beyond civilisation, emerges as a central element within the foundational myth of the state. As state and frontier come to embody the binary opposition between civilisation and savagery, the paradox is thus maintained: the frontier seems to be inescapably destined to vanish as the state expands, and yet it cannot totally cease to exist, for without the frontier the myth in which the power of the state is founded would also vanish. Thus, although the frontier comes to appear as the antithesis to the civilised order of the state, its *status* of frontier inevitably becomes not a barrier to this order but its very condition of possibility. The frontier, however, will not come to embody a space which remains "outside" or not integrated to the order of the state, but rather a space that is integrated to this order through its own exclusion.

As noted, this idea of frontier closely resembles Agamben's state of exception, or the state that results from "extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion".[73] This relation of "inclusive exclusion" is precisely what we find in the *Territorio del Caquetá*: a frontier whose incorporation to the spatial and political order of the state has historically depended on its exclusion from the imaginary order of the nation. In Codazzi's judgement about the *Territorio del Caquetá* as a "vacant" space waiting to be occupied and possessed, it is possible to foresee some of the practical implications underlying this form of relation. However, as will be shown in the following section, it is through another character, Rafael Reyes, that both the myth and the immanent violence sustaining this relation will surface.

[73] Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 18.

The secret of the state

One of the main problems in building a theory of the state, as noted by Mitchell, is that the state constitutes an "object of analysis that appears to exist simultaneously as material force and ideological construct. It seems both real and illusory".[74] According to the author, most analyses tend to dismiss one dimension in favour of the other: either they take for granted the binary dualism through which the state seems to exist as an autonomous realm completely detached from society, thus assuming the state as "abstract" construction; or they reject this dualism as mere ideological fetishism, hence adopting a perspective that privileges the study of the multiple material relations and practices embedded in the state. Although Mitchell agrees with the latter perspective in the sense that any attempt to theorise the state cannot take for granted this dualism, he argues that it is not enough simply to criticise it. Such perspective, he adds, not only ignores that it is in this dual form that the state often appears in practice, but that the agency of the state largely depends on the production of this dualism. The task of critique, according to Mitchell, is then not simply to reject the dualism but to explain *how* the effect through which state and society appear in this dual or binary form has been produced.

The relevance that a figure like Rafael Reyes has to understand how the Putumayo region entered the discourses and practices of state-making has to be considered in this sense. Like Caldas or Codazzi, Reyes personified the creole hegemonic discourse through which state and frontier came to embody the dichotomous rhetoric between civilisation and savagery. However, although Reyes could be regarded in some ways as an "organic intellectual", his historical role was not exclusively circumscribed to the sphere of discourse. Most significantly, through the different facets or roles he embodied throughout his life -entrepreneur, explorer, army officer, diplomat, statesman- it is possible to shed light not only on the process through which state and frontier became discursively constructed, but also on the material relations and practices resulting from and concealed by this discursive construction or ensemble. I will focus specifically on two of these facets,

[74] Mitchell, "Society, economy", 169.

since it is through them that the relation between the Putumayo frontier and the state can be better grasped: the *entrepreneur* and *explorer*, referring to the years he and his brothers spent in the Putumayo engaged in the cinchona and rubber trade; and the *statesman*, roughly covering the period during which he was president of Colombia (1904-1909).

Finally, it is important to stress that the point here is not to assume Reyes as a single individual who supplanted the state or seized its roles, but as the expression of certain views and practices that are both constitutive of and reflecting of the relation of inclusive exclusion between state and frontier. In other words, as with Marx's "capitalist", in dealing with Reyes, rather than a particular character we are dealing with certain types of "personifications" of particular relationships.[75] Conversely, it would be possible to argue that in facing the state, instead of an abstract or neutral force or monolithic apparatus, we are witnessing the materialisation of particular discourses and practices through which power relations are daily reproduced, enacted, and concealed. More generally, however, I want to situate and encourage the reader to see Reyes in the broader context of the historical geography of state and frontier as a maker of history in the threefold dimension drawn by Trouillot: as *agent* or individual part of a certain class or hierarchical structure; as *actor*, whose role and actions are circumscribed to a specific spatio-temporal context; and as *subject* or voice aware of his power in the production of certain historical narratives.[76]

The pioneer

The dream Reyes conceived during his early explorations in the Putumayo and which he made "public" at the Pan-American Conference in 1901, would stay with him to the end of his life. After having resigned the presidency in 1909, the tireless General, now in his early 60s, devoted a few years travelling across Europe, the United States and the South American republics, where he continued to promote his continental integration project and crusaded in favour of the Pan-American union. An account of these travels would be published in Spanish and English in 1914 and reproduced in instalments in the New York

[75] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1949 [1867]), xix.
[76] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the past. Power and the production of history* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 22-24.

Times. The American newspaper, although recommending his work due to the "official prestige of his author" and the "intrinsic interest of the narrative", regretted the fact that the author did not describe in detail the story of his adventures in the "thrilling no man's land" of Putumayo.[77] Certainly, the chapter on the Putumayo basically consisted of an abridged version of the paper he presented in Mexico years before. However, Reyes added here a short introduction where, in a paragraph that evokes the opening episode of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* -where Marlow recalls his childhood obsession with the blank spaces on the world map- he tells the reader about his early fascination for the "unknown" forests of the Putumayo. "From my very childhood" –he writes- "I felt myself attracted by the mystery of those immense forests. I used to cherish plans for exploring them, and of opening across them a communication with the Atlantic, thus giving new channels for commerce and for the glory of my fatherland".[78]

Reyes never published a detailed account of the time he spent in the "mysterious" Putumayo. However, he narrated this story in a series of notebooks and letters to his sons that he wrote during the early 1910s, and which were published posthumously as his *Memoirs.*[79] There, he tells how he ended up in the Putumayo, a story that seems to have more to do with chance than with premeditated resolution. Indeed, as he notes, although as young as 17 he had concluded that his native land –the small town of Santa Rosa de Viterbo, in the central province of Boyacá- was "too narrow a theatre" for his "great ambitions",[80] his initial plan was to travel to Panama or California, a common destination at the time for fortune seekers. He was about to leave when his mother got a letter from his elder brother Elías, where he asked her to send Rafael and Enrique to assist him in an import business he had established in the city of Popayán.[81] As the latter decided to stay in order to take care of the family –Reyes' father had died several years ago- the young and

[77] "Two Americas. Travels north and south by Gen. Reyes", accessed September 10, 2011, http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=F10E12FC3D5E13738DDDA10894DB405B848DF1D3
[78] Rafael Reyes, *The two Americas* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1914), 41-42.
[79] Reyes, *Memorias….*
[80] Reyes, *Memorias,* 32.
[81] Popayán was then the capital of the state of Cauca, to which the extensive *Territorio del Caquetá* belonged.

ambitious Rafael, without hesitating, embarked by foot and mule on the long and arduous journey to Popayán.

Not long after he had joined his brother Elías, Reyes saw a great business opportunity in the exportation of cinchona tree bark, out of which quinine was extracted, a substance known for its anti-malarial properties, and which was in high demand at the time in Europe and the United States. Since the cinchona trees grew in abundance in the southern Andean foothills and they remained largely unexploited, Reyes undertook a series of expeditions to buy the bark from the few "whites" living there and also to explore new exploitation areas. It was during one of those expeditions -across the slopes of the cordillera to the east of Popayán-, that Reyes mentions he saw for the first time the immense Amazon lowlands. Watching from the top of a tree, a scene that vividly evokes a famous scene of Herzog's movie *Fitzcarraldo*, he could not but marvel with that "endless and immense green ocean". Then, in one of his expressions of bewilderment with the grandeur of the Amazon, a theatre that at last seemed to be big enough for his "great ambitions", he writes:

> Those virgin and *unknown* forests, those immense spaces, fascinated and attracted me to explore them, to traverse them and get to the sea, and to open roads for the progress and welfare of my country; those forests were *absolutely unknown* to the inhabitants of the cordillera, and the idea to penetrate them terrified me since the popular imagination populated them with wild beasts and monsters, beside the numerous savage cannibals found there.[82]

This proclamation, that Reyes invariably brings whenever he introduces his expeditions to the Putumayo, and which is revealing of the fusing of patriotism and self-ambition so typical of his character, strikingly mirrors the creole vision of the frontier described in the previous section. Yet, as it has already been noted, in Reyes we witness not only the rhetoric but the material practices and realities stemming from it. The commercial activities –mainly around the extraction and export of cinchona bark- he and his brothers undertook in Putumayo during the 1870s constitute a remarkable example of both the rhetoric and the practice. Reyes' best-known biography, for instance, not only states that the Reyes brothers' company (*Elías Reyes y Hermanos*) was the first large-scale commercial initiative founded

[82] Reyes, *Memorias,* 81 (emphasis added).

in Colombia, but also eulogises that: "we don't know of any [company] which, under private initiative, *without official support* and with no political ambitions of any kind, had mobilised such quantity of men and money towards a *licit, and at the same time progressive and patriotic goal*".[83]

Although this statement might appear exaggerated, it sharply captures the discourse in which Reyes himself infused all his commercial projects and achievements. Moreover, the significance that the Reyes brothers' company has in the history of the Colombian Amazon is widely recognised.[84] In this sense, even though –as mentioned before- the Putumayo was far from being unknown by the time Reyes had his epiphany at the top of a tree, it is a fact that prior to he and his brothers starting their extractive activities, the presence of Colombians in the region –excluding the "savage tribes"- was insignificant. This situation would change drastically in the following decades as a result of the cinchona and especially the rubber boom, the Reyes brothers clearly counting among the pioneers of that infamous episode in the history of the Amazon.[85] It is not accurate, however, that the brothers did not have any official support, as they obtained from the government a large land concession in the upper Putumayo and Caquetá basins, an area abounding in cinchona forests.[86] Still, rather than being an unintended omission, the biographer's imprecision reflects the widespread view of the Putumayo as a vacant frontier waiting to be grabbed.

From a commercial standpoint, the brothers' venture could be considered to be a truly remarkable story of endeavour and achievement. In 1875, as the cinchona forests to the east of Popayán began to be exhausted, they focused their activities in the Putumayo

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[83] Eduardo Lemaitre, *Rafael Reyes*. *Biografía de un Gran Colombiano* (Bogotá: Banco de la República, 1981 [1951]), 89 (emphasis added).

[84] For a historical account of the quinine boom and the role played by the Reyes brothers' Company in this context, see: Carlos Zárate, *Extracción de quina: la configuración del espacio Andino-Amazónico de fines de siglo XIX* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2001); Domínguez, *Amazonia,* 81-103; Gómez and Domínguez, "Quinerías" …

[85] The Putumayo rubber boom constitutes a subject that has been extensively studied. Some contemporary bibliographical sources include: Michael Edward Stanfield, *Red rubber, bleeding trees: violence, slavery, and empire in northwest Amazonia, 1850-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Augusto Gómez, et.al., *Caucherías y conflicto Colombo-Peruano. Testimonios 1904-1934* (Unión Europea: Coama, 1995); Domínguez, *Amazonia,* 79-200.

[86] Domínguez, *Amazonia,* 87.

piedmont, and Mocoa became the Company's operational base. The brothers did pretty well in the following years, and the company staff increased significantly as friends and other family members joined, including Rafael's brothers (on his mother's side) Enrique and Néstor. Yet, it was the ambitious and visionary Rafael who was the one who conceived the ingenious idea that would come to symbolise the major achievement and commercial success of the Company. This idea, which basically contemplated the development of steamship navigation along the Putumayo River, was the one that led him to undertake his epic journey from Pasto to Rio de Janeiro. The logic was simple: the Putumayo River –navigable for most of its course- would give the Company access to the Atlantic through the Amazon, thus avoiding the Pacific route, not only longer –especially to Europe- but considerably more difficult, as the cinchona bark had to be transported several days by land through the steep trails of the cordillera.

Reyes' plan would be completed by the construction of a road from Mocoa –not far from the embarkation point at the site of Guineo- to Pasto, hence establishing a transoceanic route linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Therefore, soon after he arrived from his trip to Brazil, in a letter published in Pasto on 16th of February 1876, he announced the success of his journey and also urged the convenience of the road. The French traveller Edouard Andre, who arrived in Pasto soon after the letter was published, mentions that the *pastusos*, following Reyes advice, asked the federal government for funds to build the road. However, notes Andre, "revolution broke and the clap of the thunder vanished the illusion".[87]

Despite the failure of this early initiative to build the Pasto-Mocoa road, Reyes achieved a major goal during his journey, as he got permission from the Brazilian government to ship both Colombian and Brazilian goods using the Putumayo and Amazon rivers. Although Reyes would celebrate this navigation agreement with Brazil as a great nationalistic triumph and praised himself for "having discovered an important waterway to our

[87] Andre is alluding here to the 1876 civil war, one amongst several conflicts that confronted Liberals and Conservatives throughout nineteenth century. Edouard André, *América equinoccial*, Colección América Pintoresca, vol.2 (Cali: Carvajal, 1884), 773.

country",[88] he would later be accused of blatant self-interest. Purportedly, the Brazilian government permission was given exclusively to the Reyes brothers' Company, and stipulated that the shipping was to be made only in Brazilian crafts.[89] Although we have no record of Reyes ever having replied to such claims, it is more than likely that he would have refuted it by vehemently asserting –as he usually did- the patriotic and nationalistic character of all his individual and commercial achievements. This, on the other hand, was in perfect accordance with Reyes' character, who deemed himself a great "civiliser" and crusader for progress and relentlessly claimed, amongst other things, to having put an end to the Brazilian indigenous slave trade in the Putumayo; "civilising" the "cannibal Indians" he made contact with; and being the first Colombian to exert national sovereignty along the borders with Peru and Brazil.[90]

The significance of Reyes' self-proclaimed achievements lies, however, not so much in how patriotic or even true they were, as in how they revealed the rhetoric through which state and frontier became two dichotomous and yet mutually constructed spaces, the former's aura of authority and supremacy built upon the savagery and barbarism of the latter. It was through this same rhetoric, as previously argued, that the frontier would be *imaginarily* assimilated to the order of the nation. Although it has already been described how this "imaginary order" was crafted and acquired a hegemonic character, there is hardly a better graphic illustration of this order than the map of the Reyes' brothers explorations in South America (see map 5).

[88] Reyes, *Memorias,* 161.
[89] Demetrio Salamanca, *La Amazonia Colombiana*, vol.2 (Tunja: Academia Boyacense de Historia, 1994), 375.
[90] These claims are found in numerous occasions in Reyes' writings. See, for example: Reyes, *Memorias,* 135, 142-43; "Carta al Ministro de Colombia en Washington", Bogotá, julio 25 de 1905, BLAA, Libros raros y manuscritos, MSS391; Rafael Reyes, *Escritos varios* (Bogotá: Tipografía Ancovar, 1920), 580-589.

Map 5. "*Map showing the explorations made by the Reyes' brothers in South America and the projected Intercontinental Railroad"* (detail)[91]

This map was elaborated by Reyes on the occasion of the Pan-American Conference, and published together with his paper. The "civilisation/savagery" rhetoric is here skilfully portrayed through the various features represented on the map, which together comprise a dichotomous landscape drawn on a blank sketch map of the Continent. On the one hand, we see the cross dotted lines signalling the various explorations carried out by the Reyes brothers during the 1870s, explorations that were for the most part confined to fluvial navigation of some of the Amazon's tributaries. These lines, which mostly serve the purpose of demonstrating the navigability of these rivers, are connected to a series of square dotted lines, indicating the projected roads –such as the Pasto-Mocoa road-

[91] Reyes, *Across,* 41.

connecting his colossal navigation scheme with the planned Inter-Continental railroad (indicated by the gross line running north-south). This projected landscape symbolises *the future* as conceived by Reyes, a future supported by the vastness and richness of the Putumayo and Amazon regions, and of which Reyes declared in the Conference –picking up President Roosevelt words- "[comprises] a new world that offers itself for the progress and well-being of humanity".[92] On the other hand, we have the backward and untamed landscape, symbolised by the spaces along the railroad tracks and predominantly those in between the Amazon tributaries. The former, filled with small rings, indicate areas rich in mineral resources such as gold, silver, copper, iron, and coal; the latter, a chaotic collage crowded with shrubs, arrows, and skulls, represents the simultaneous presence of wild cocoa and rubber, "savages", and "cannibals", respectively. Against this composite image embodying the past, present, and future of the frontier, the Reyes brothers –Rafael in the middle and Néstor and Enrique to either side- stand proudly at the top, personifying the white man's burden of civilisation and progress.

The power of Reyes' map, a power whose immanent logic cannot be detached from the colonial production of knowledge, rests not so much in the "reality" it exposes, but on the effect through which the cartographer's *fiction* acquires an *illusion of reality*. And so we are told in the prologue to Reyes' presentation at the Mexico Conference regarding the "accuracy" of his map:

> There exists maps in abundance containing facts which have appeared in books and articles and *which are more or less real*, but how often it happened that *much is due to imagination*, such as rivers, mountains, valleys *which do not exist in reality*…Everything contained in this valuable work has been verified by the explorer himself. Should any traveller be detained on those burning sands where the brothers Reyes dug their hollow beds under the ground find himself misled by some freak of reflection, he may rely upon the map of the Columbian (sic.) traveller although deceived momentarily and like Le Verrier, when investigating his planet in the mysterious expanse of space, may say "I do not see it, but affirm that it exists there". A similar *effect* is produced by this excellent map which is the result of the geographical labours of our respected and dear countryman.[93]

[92] Reyes, *Across,* 36.
[93] Reyes, *Across,* 9 (emphasis added).

But, how is this illusion of reality accomplished? The "secret" is easily revealed if we look closer at the map. There, and beneath Reyes' collage of cannibals, railroads, and rubber, there is not so much chaos but a clearly delineated spatial and temporal order through which the untamed space of the frontier is rendered legible by a series of simple and yet visually effective binary conventions. It is in the production of this order that the mastery of the cartographer is fully exposed, an order that, as argued by Brian Harley, can only be consummated by the multiple cartographic "silences" –cultural, toponymic, historical- through which the "objects outside the surveyor's classification of 'reality' are excluded".[94]

I want to emphasise the rhetorical violence embedded in such silences -so profuse in Reyes' map-, for it is through the enactment of this violence at the level of representation that the *physical* violence we encounter at the level of practice is both assimilated and concealed. This circular logic of enactment and concealment is what Taussig -in deciphering the rationale behind the regime of terror which unfolded around the Putumayo rubber economy- denominates the mimesis between the violence projected onto the Indians and the violence perpetrated by the colonist: a mimesis which "occurs by a colonial mirroring of otherness that reflects back onto the colonists the barbarity of their own social relations, but as imputed to the savagery they yearn to colonize".[95]

There are several episodes in Reyes' *Memoirs* where this mimetic violence comes to light. However, I will just refer two of them, as they mirror best the dialectic relation between rhetoric and material violence through which the Putumayo frontier would be integrated to the order of the state. The first episode took place in 1874 during Reyes' first expedition to the Putumayo, an excursion he undertook with the primary aim of spotting cinchona tree forests in the Andean foothills. After having left Pasto and crossed the *páramo* of Bordoncillo, which separates the city from the Sibundoy valley, he spent a few days among the Sibundoy Indians -which he described as "semi-savages"- procuring carriers to take him across the steep trail from there to Mocoa. According to Reyes, the Sibundoy "supreme

[94] J.B. Harley, *The new nature of maps. Essays in the history of cartography* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 98.
[95] Taussig, *Shamanism,* 134.

chief", Pedro Chindoy, promised to get him the carriers in a period of five days. However, the time passed and Chindoy not only had not kept his word but asked him to wait for another four days with the excuse that there was a party taking place in town. Although Reyes refused to accept the chief's petition, in the end he had no choice but to wait.

Finally, when the agreed day arrived, the desperate young explorer went to look for Chindoy. Yet, imagine his surprise when he was welcomed with the following words: "I offered you carriers with no real intention of giving them to you because we don't want the whites coming to our land, so the best thing you can do is head back to Pasto or otherwise we will force you to get out of here, and from today you are not welcome at my place anymore".[96] At this point, and foreseeing the potential threat faced by him and his two "white" companions posed by Chindoy –who was accompanied by around 80 Indians- Reyes declares that "I realised that if I didn't make myself respected by this Indian my expedition was lost".[97] Thus, he narrates how he was "forced" to pull out his revolver and make a warning shot which left the Indians "terrified", and taking advantage of the situation he "knocked" the chief down and with the help of his friends put him in the stocks they found in the room. Reyes' "manoeuvre" took immediate effect as the "frightened" Chindoy, begging him "not to kill him" offered him ten of his best men for the following day and meanwhile entertained him with his "best delicacies": eggs, chicken and pork meat. The triumphant Reyes, however, is hardly able to get over the surprise of having frightened more than 80 Indians with only his revolver, and explains the incident as due to the "cowardice" and "pusillanimity" of the Sibundoy Indians.

The second episode would take place several months later, when the brothers were already exporting the cinchona bark to Europe and the United States via the Putumayo and Amazon Rivers. During the first steam navigation in the Putumayo, Reyes mentions that he visited and befriended the Cosacunty Indians, a tribe he found in the middle course of the Putumayo and which according to him was made of "around 500 beautiful and robust

[96] Reyes, *Memorias,* 112.
[97] *Reyes, Memorias,* 112.

individuals".[98] Reyes felt a special affection for this indigenous community, and after spending a few days among them and having bartered some tools and chickens in exchange for wood for his steamer, he left for Belém with the promise of stopping over on his way back. "I saw them disappear from one of the river bends" -tells the explorer in a nostalgic tone- "and I lost myself in the immense solitude of those forests with the hope of see them again within the agreed time".[99] Three months later, and faithful to his word, Reyes arrived at the foot of the small hill where the Cosacunty lived. After having sounded the boat's whistle several times with no response from the Indians, he finally decided to climb the hill and take a look for himself. Then, as he narrates:

> When we were at about one hundred meters distance from the Indians' huts, I felt an unbearable smell of putrefaction and sensed something horrible had happened to that tribe…When I had reached the top of the hill, the smell was so nauseous that I couldn't even breath. No signs of life were seen from the huts. Accompanied by the two sailors, we rush to the chief Otuchaba's hut, whose bamboo door was ajar. I pushed it and the scene I had in front of my eyes was so horrifying that even today, after so many years, just the act of describing it terrifies me. Lying of the ground there were more than thirty corpses of elderly people, men, women and children, in a total state of decomposition. Some of them kept their eyes, throwing flames of pain and suffering.[100]

In the midst of this scene, which Reyes himself describes as "Dantean" and to his stupefaction realises that it was reproduced in every hut of the village, he found the only survivors: a dying woman with a baby on her breast, who told Reyes the cause of the tragedy was an epidemic that spread among the whole tribe soon after he left. Reyes, meanwhile, concluded that the epidemic was a "sort of tuberculosis which I have noticed the white man brings to the savages of the Amazon" and that "this is the way how these savages suffer miseries and die".[101]

Reyes' statement *seems* ironic not only as he repeatedly claimed to be the first "white man" the "savages" and "cannibals" of the Putumayo had ever seen, but since it is quite likely that it was he and his crew who had spread the virus among the Cosacunty Indians. And yet, there is nothing really ironic about it. What this episode –together with that with the

[98] Reyes, *Memorias,* 115.
[99] Reyes, *Memorias,* 116.
[100] Reyes, *Memorias,* 116.
[101] Reyes, *Memorias,* 116.

Sibundoy Indians- exposed, instead, is precisely the effect through which the violence rooted in the assimilation of the frontier to the state is both neutralised and concealed by the *myth* opposing the former's state of nature to the latter's civilising character.

The statesman

As with every boom period, the heyday of the quinine trade and with it the glory days of the Reyes brothers' Company, eventually came to an end. By 1884, and as a consequence of the growing production in the Dutch plantations in Java and Ceylon, the international prices fell to the point that the brothers had to liquidate the Company due to bankruptcy. Still, the brothers' final days in the Putumayo were marked by another venture that ended up being a calamitous failure. Around 1880, when the quinine prices were already declining, the brothers decided to set up in the rubber business. They brought hundreds of labourers from different parts the country and established a station in the middle course of the Putumayo River. Yet, they had barely initiated the works when an epidemic of yellow fever spread among the workers, killing in a matter of weeks about three quarters of them. Reyes recalls this episode as a ruthless battle with a "savage nature that defended against man's domination", and again had to make use of his revolver to persuade the frightened survivors desperately seeking to desert.[102] This time, however, his gun proved useless against nature and the battle was eventually lost, the brothers having to abandon the place. It was also during this period that his brother Néstor, who left the station to explore other potential places for rubber, perished among the "cannibal Huitotes".[103] Enrique, his other brother, would die a few years later from yellow fever while extracting rubber in the Yuruá and Yavarí Rivers. Reyes' closing words to this episode cannot hide his despair: "from the rubber discovered by us we got nothing but disgrace and capital losses; this is the fate of the conquerors".[104]

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[102] Reyes, *Memorias,* 171-173.
[103] Reyes, *Memorias,* 173-176.
[104] Reyes, *Memorias,* 177.

The story of how the defeated entrepreneur, who left the Putumayo in 1884, became president two decades later, is long and intricate. This story, however, is to a large extent related to a successful military career he initiated soon after leaving behind his role as an explorer and businessman. Reyes' military victories, especially during the civil wars of 1885 and 1895, which he fought on the side of the Conservatives, gained him enormous popularity and also made him a prominent figure within this party.[105] Historians, moreover, tend to stress that his non-partisan character represented a major influence for his election in July 1904, particularly since the country had just emerged from the War of the Thousand Days, the most extended and devastating civil conflict since independence. Reyes' government, which he ended up exercising in an authoritative manner under the flag –borrowed from his much-admired Porfirio Díaz- of "less politics and more administration", is generally regarded as modernist and reformist, and Reyes himself as *man of practice* rather than a politician.[106] Among the reforms he pursued -which included the professionalisation of the military, territorial re-organisation aimed at counteracting the regional elite's' power, and fiscal restructuring to enhance the government revenues-, the modernisation of the banking system and the improvement of the country's transport network occupied a relevant place. These two reforms, which were particularly directed towards creating an environment favourable to foreign investment, plainly mirror the extractivist vision the General so vigorously cultivated during his early days in the Putumayo. This vision, often blended with patriotic allusions to "modernity" and "progress", are manifestly present in this much quoted passage from one of his speeches: "In times past it was the Cross or the Koran, the sword or book that accomplished the conquests of civilisation; today it is the powerful locomotive, flying over the shining rail,

[105] A detailed account of Reyes' military career can be found in his biography by Eduardo Lemaitre. See Lemaitre, *Rafael Reyes,* 15-52, 122-163.

[106] For a detailed description of Reyes' government see: Bushnell, *The making,* 151-161; Darío Mesa, "La vida política después de Panamá", *Manual de Historia de Colombia*, T.III, 83-176 (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1986), 96-109; Charles Bergquist, *Coffee and Conflict in Colombia, 1886-1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), 225-246; Ricardo Sánchez, ed., *La Reconstrucción Nacional. Estudio de la administración del excelentísimo General D. Rafael Reyes* (Bogotá: Casa Editorial La Prensa, 1908); Humberto Vélez, "Rafael Reyes: Quinquenio, régimen político y capitalismo (1904-1909)", in Nueva Historia de Colombia, ed. Alvaro Tirado, Vol. I, 187-214 (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 1989).

breathing like a volcano, that awakens people to progress, well-being and liberty…and to those who do not conform to that process it crushes beneath its wheels".[107]

It is by considering the rhetoric in which this vision was founded and sustained, as described in the previous sections, that I suggest Reyes' government policies and politics towards the *frontier* can be better understood. In his inaugural presidential speech, delivered at the National Congress in August 7th of 1904, in a passage that clearly refers to his own patriotic enterprises during the 1870s, he made the following allusion to the Putumayo region:

> *Our* eastern territory, whose inconceivable wealth has been unveiled by a few sons of Colombia who had ventured themselves into those primary forests, or even paid with their own blood our sovereignty in those vast regions, awaits for the *efficacy* of the country's patriotism, so that, through the determined will of the entire Nation, the treasures which are currently exploited there by foreigners, in detriment of *our rights, are* opened for the country.[108]

Certainly, Reyes began his government by taking practical measures regarding the vast and neglected Putumayo territory. In January 1905, he established the Intendancy of Putumayo with Mocoa as its capital, and during that same year the central government covered 75% of its expenses.[109] He actively supported the recently established Capuchin Mission, subsidising its activities through the Ministry of Public Instruction. The Pasto-Mocoa road, a project he could never accomplish during his days as a businessman, also formed part of his concerns. In 1906, and under the justification that the road was of great importance not only in terms of economic development but national sovereignty, he authorised -through the newly created Ministry of Public Works- engineering studies with the purpose of exploring and projecting the potential routes.[110]

The initial impetus with which Reyes embraced the Putumayo would soon vanish. In March 1906, just one year after it was created, the Intendancy of Putumayo was suppressed and its territory left under the jurisdiction of the Department of Nariño. The road works were suspended by the government in early 1908, allegedly due to a lack of funds, and they

[107] As quoted by Bergquist, *Coffee and Conflict*, 221.
[108] Sánchez, *La Reconstrucción Nacional,* vii (emphasis added).
[109] Stanfield, *Red rubber,* 109.
[110] AGN, Ministerio de Obras Públicas (Ministry of Public Works, henceforth MOP), vol. 1407, fols.8-10, 39-40.

would not be resumed until late 1909, when Reyes had already left the presidency.[111] Ultimately, and in what seems a paradox, the role played in the Putumayo by the indefatigable General during the nearly five years that he remained in power was to be remembered, at best, as controversial and ambiguous. The grounds on which this perception is founded are to a large extent related to two episodes in which Reyes was directly involved.

This first episode is related to an extensive land concession granted by Reyes' government to a Colombian company to extract rubber in the middle Putumayo, which ended up favouring the interests of the infamous Peruvian Rubber Company, the *Casa Arana*.[112] The history of the concession dates back to 1900, when Reyes was abroad as Plenipotentiary Minister to France. During that year, his nephew Florentino Calderón, who had worked in the Reyes brothers' Company back in the 1870s, made an initial attempt to obtain the necessary concession from the government. The contract, drawn up by Florentino and presented to his brother Carlos Calderón, then Minister of Finance, stipulated, among other things, the cession for a period of 30 years of a vast strip of land between the Putumayo and Caquetá Rivers. In exchange, the contractor committed to support the Catholic Missions, to establish steamship navigation in the Caquetá and Putumayo and maintain the trail from Pasto to Mocoa, and to "facilitate" the assimilation of the indigenous communities to "civilised life". In order to provide a legal basis for the contract, the Minister hastened to establish a Decree, which specified that the central government could lease, for a period of up to 30 years, "vacant lands" of extensions greater than 5,000 hectares. The main argument supporting the law, summarised in its first article, stated that "the deserted regions of the Republic, home to the non-civilised indigenous population, have remained to date unproductive to the Nation".[113]

[111] AGN, MOP, vol. 1407, fol.154.
[112] For a detailed historical account of this concession see Salamanca, *La Amazonia Colombiana*, 95-122; also Augusto Gómez, "Traición a la Patria", Revista Universitas, No.37, (1993): 6-24.
[113] Decree 645 (February 9th 1900), as quoted by Leopoldo Cajiao, *Arrendamiento o venta del Territorio del Caquetá*, (Bogotá: Imprenta de la Luz, 1900) 9-10.

Lastly, and in order to avoid charges of nepotism, the Calderón brothers had asked a third person, Leopoldo Cajiao, to appear in the contract as concessionaire. However, to their surprise, in the last minute Cajiao refused to sign the contract alleging that the concession was highly detrimental to the "interests of the Nation". Cajiao not only accused the Calderons of taking advantage of the country's current "state of exception" –which had been decreed due to the ongoing civil war- to evade the legal requisite of submitting the contract to a public tender; most seriously, he argued that, once obtained, the brothers had the intention of transferring the concession to a French firm using as intermediary a Colombian trading house based in Paris.

The scandal that followed Cajiao's charges eventually frustrated the Calderóns' initiative. Nevertheless, Florentino did not give up. In a brief book he published in 1902 entitled *Nuestros desiertos del Caquetá y Amazonas* (*Our deserts of Caquetá and Amazonas*), he denounced Cajiao's accusations as an "extraordinary defamation" and defended the concession as a "truly patriotic" enterprise not only intended to "civilise" the "savages" of the Putumayo, but to exercise territorial sovereignty over the territories in dispute with Peru.[114] With these arguments, the rubber prices soaring, and his uncle now elected president, he made a second attempt. Through the firm Cano, Cuello & Co., a rubber company that was established in the Putumayo in 1903, he finally obtained from Reyes' government the much-coveted concession. The Cano, Cuello & Co. concession, granted in January 1905, and of which Florentino came in as business partner and general manager, basically contemplated the cession to the Company, for a period of 25 years, of a large territory –calculated to be 100,000 square km- between the Putumayo and Caquetá rivers.[115] The conditions of the contract were to a large extent similar to the previous one, and included the grant of the property rights at the expiration date of concession over the lands where the Company had buildings and plantations.

[114] Florentino Calderón, *Nuestros desiertos del Caquetá y del Amazonas y sus riquezas* (Bogotá: Imprenta de Luis M. Holguín, 1902).
[115] Salamanca, *La Amazonia Colombiana*, 113.

The Cano, Cuello & Co. concession eventually turned into a national scandal. The centre of this scandal revolved around the fact that the concession territory, which the Company initially intended to cede to an American conglomerate –the *Amazon Colombian Rubber & Trading Company*- with the needed capital to exploit it, ended up in the hands of the Casa Arana. The scandal would have been kept quiet if it were not for the fact that this same territory formed a part of a dispute with Peru, and also since the recent loss of Panama in 1903, both of which had awakened nationalistic sentiments. This time the charges, moreover, directly involved Reyes, and came mostly from two of his main political detractors. Santiago Rozo, Consul at Manaus, issued in April 1910 a formal complaint to the country's General Attorney, in which he accused Fidel Cuello, Enrique Cortés, and Rafael Reyes of "Traición a la Patria" (betrayal of the nation). Specifically, he accused the first two, general manager of Cano, Cuello & Co and Minister to the United States during Reyes' government respectively, for having illegally negotiated the concession with the Casa Arana, and thus facilitating the *de facto* appropriation of the disputed territory. As for Reyes, Rozo denounced him as accomplice, particularly for having authorised the signature of the concession "knowing beforehand" its detrimental effects for the country.[116]

Demetrio Salamanca, one of Reyes' former employees in the Putumayo and later Consul at Belém, went further than Rozo. He argued that the two *modus vivendi* signed between Colombia and Peru in 1905 and 1906, which recognised the status quo over the territory in dispute and served as a temporary measure while both countries reached a definitive agreement, favoured the violent eviction of Colombian caucheros by employees of the Casa Arana. As the 1906 agreement contemplated the immediate withdrawal of civil and military authorities along the zone in dispute, Salamanca explicitly suggested that this measure would also have facilitated the sale of the concession to Arana. He even went on to argue that the press censorship established by Reyes in 1906 had a close relation with the Putumayo concession, thus declaring that the "dictator Reyes, accomplice and accessory of the crimes perpetuated in Putumayo...had a wicked interest in keeping Colombians ignorant of the current situation in Putumayo, and for that reason silenced the press and

[116] The complete text of Rozo's formal complaint is reproduced by Gómez, "Traición a la Patria", 21-23.

persecuted those patriots who defended the territorial integrity and the honour of Colombia".[117]

Both Rozo and Salamanca's claims contain numerous rumours and versions taken from other people involved in the concession, referring to juicy bribes, blackmail and fraud. Through them, the case itself becomes an intricate game of mutual accusations when the perpetrators themselves turn into victims and victims into perpetrators, thus blurring the line between fiction and fact. Reyes himself, who never set foot in the Putumayo after his tragic rubber venture, refuted the criticisms and accusations by invoking once more the patriotic crusades he accomplished during his youth, and the many sacrifices he and his brothers endured among the "savages" and unhealthy forests.[118] Eventually, the concession scandal subsided and Reyes, along with the other accused, got away unpunished. After having resigned the presidency in June 1909 –mostly due to the increasing opposition to his dictatorial regime and unpopular measures regarding the negotiations with the United States in relation to Panama- he sailed into exile to Europe on board of a United Fruit Company boat. Whilst there, and just as another scandal of much bigger proportions unfolded around the atrocities involved in the midst of the rubber boom, the General devoted his time to spread word of his heroic adventures and promising discoveries in the "new world" of the Putumayo.

The relevance of the Cano, Cuello & Co. concession scandal to the argument presented here lies not in how fabricated or real the claims were or to what extent justice was done. The scandal, which revolved around claims such as betrayal of the "honour of the nation", the lack of "patriotic virtue" or simply bribery and corruption, not only concealed but left intact the rhetoric and material violence in which state and frontier became embedded. In other words, it revealed the hegemonic force of the creole state project through which the frontier was crafted as a vacant and savage space in which the civilising mission of the state

[117] Salamanca, *La Amazonia Colombiana*, 119.
[118] Rafael Reyes, *Por Colombia, por Ibero-América* (Londres: Imprenta de Wertheimer, LEA & Cia, 1912), 89-96; "Carta del General Reyes", *El Nuevo Tiempo*, Bogotá, November 21 1913.

–as incarnated variously in the characters of the explorer, the entrepreneur, and the statesman- was to be founded and enacted.

The apparently ambiguous and controversial Reyes government's attitude towards the Putumayo must be appraised precisely in that sense: not as resulting from inconsistent behaviour on the part of the ambitious and egocentric president, but as the "inclusive exclusive" relation through which the frontier was to be assimilated to the order of the state. Let me finish by briefly referring the other episode for which Reyes' government would be remembered and which epitomises this point. In early 1906, after being victim of a failed *coup d'état* and attempted murder, Reyes decided to send the main conspirators into exile to the Putumayo. For this purpose, he established by decree the Penal colony of Mocoa in April of that year, so the town where he and his brothers initiated their "patriotic" quinine business back in 1870s, ended up serving as a site of confinement for his political adversaries. Although most of the conspirators would soon be released, Reyes' decision would leave an indelible imprint on the history of Mocoa. Guillermo Guerrero, an engineer from Mocoa who deeply admired Reyes' visionary inter-oceanic project and even went so far as to declare that the "active presence of the state" in the Putumayo began with him, could not hide his bewilderment and indignation about his decision to make Mocoa a penal colony. This is the angry reply he gave me the first time I asked him about this event:

> I haven't been able to read that decree just because it gets on my nerves, although this is my own emotional problem...Execrating Mocoa, demonising Mocoa as a penal colony. So one thinks, how dumb the people from the Colombian Andes. They never had a vision of the Amazon. The always saw the Amazon, let's say, as shit. Where is Mocoa? It's *in* the shit.

Guillermo's resentment must surely be shared among many people inhabiting frontier regions across Colombia. For, although Reyes can be considered a pioneer in conceiving these territories as "natural" places to exile criminals and political prisoners –he also established other penal colonies in the *Llanos* region-[119] this constituted a common state policy throughout the twentieth century. Moreover, and despite the fact that many of the

[119] See Jane Rausch, *La Frontera de los Llanos en la historia de Colombia (1830-1930)*, (Bogotá: Banco de la República, El Áncora Editores, 1999), 302-304.

initiatives of creating penal colonies during this period remained on paper, it has been noted that they contributed to create an image of regions such as the Llanos or the Amazon as a "space of exile".[120] Still, and against Guillermo's perception, one could say that the people from the Andes did actually have a *vision*. This vision, whose origins date back to colonial times and which we find refined throughout the nineteenth century by *Creole pioneers* such as Caldas, Codazzi, and Reyes, is essential to understand the myth in which the modern state was founded and sustained.

As it was argued, the apparently contradictory nature of this myth lies in that, although state and frontier *appear* as two fundamentally irreconcilable orders, the latter's state of nature becomes not an *obstacle* but a condition of possibility in which the former's power is rooted and perpetuated. Thus, and underneath the illusory effect by which the frontier appears in a relation of externality to the order of the state, we find not its isolation from that order but the logics through which it is included to it. This constitutes the same principle of the *state of exception* in which, as argued by Agamben, the logic of state sovereignty is ultimately grounded; for, as he notes, "the exception does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule, suspending itself, gives the rise to the exception and, maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule".[121]

It is only by considering this relation of "inclusive exclusion" in which state and frontier have been historically entangled, that I suggest it is possible to understand many of the plans and projects, utopian or not, that have left an imprint on the landscape and peoples of the Putumayo. It is also from this background, as I seek to show in the next two chapters, that we can come to see the story of the Pasto-Mocoa not as an isolated event but as part of the broader historical geography of state and frontier.

[120] Gómez, *Putumayo*, 69.
[121] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 18.

Chapter 2
A titans' work

In the previous chapter, I explored the origins of the particular rhetoric through which the Putumayo was discursively constructed as a frontier, and the way in which this same rhetoric was intimately connected to the foundational myth of the Colombian state. Moreover, I described how the power of this myth rested on the production and perpetuation of the notion of the frontier as a space embodying the antithesis of "civilisation", and of the state as incarnating this same idea of civilisation. In other words, through myth, state and frontier became two inseparable spheres, the former's "civilising" nature ultimately depending on the latter's "savage" condition. The essential corollary stemming from this myth, it was argued, was that the frontier would not remain excluded from the state but rather be included by means of exclusion. Finally, I argued that the relation of *inclusive exclusion* was crucial within the historical geography of state and frontier in the particular context of the Putumayo.

This chapter continues exploring this historical geography, now in the specific context of the road. My main concern here is how the road became a central element within the rhetoric of state and frontier and, conversely, how this rhetoric became a fundamental aspect within the discursive and material practices of the road. In doing so, I have divided the chapter into three parts. The first part (section 1) is built around a missionary account of the road and is about how it was imagined as a powerful infrastructure aimed at redeeming the Putumayo from its "savage" character, and the way in which this image became strongly attached to the figure and the "civilising" project of the Capuchin Mission.

In discussing the character of this actor and the role it played in the road, it will be argued that it did not represent an institution or force external but –and similar to the figure of Rafael Reyes- inherent or constitutive to the process of state-making in the frontier and, more specifically, as an expression of the relation of *inclusive exclusion* characterising this process. This dimension of the Capuchin Mission and especially the way in which it became a hegemonic actor in the Putumayo, as I will show, is vital to grasp how the project of the road was finally put into practice. This process will be addressed in the second part of the chapter (sections 2 and 3), which narrates the early history of the road (1906-1912) during which its first section was built.

The third part (section 4) is about the road's inauguration events in the year 1912 and is mostly concerned with the rituals that accompanied such events. These rituals consisted of a series of parades, speeches, and official ceremonies on the occasion of the completion of the road section from Pasto to Mocoa. The significance of these rituals in the historical geography of state and frontier, as I will attempt to demonstrate, is twofold. First, I will describe how, at an explicit level, they were intended to celebrate what the road symbolised in the particular temporal and spatial context in which it was inscribed, or its manifold effects –symbolic and material- in the Putumayo frontier: sovereignty, civilisation, colonisation, patriotism, Christian faith, and so forth. Secondly, it will be argued that, at a more implicit yet fundamental level, they constituted a re-enactment and reification of the state myth through which the violence involved in the road was concealed or rendered invisible.

A mission's tale

During the first three decades of the twentieth century Bogotá witnessed a rapid growth. Its population, which barely amounted 40,000 in 1870, increased almost sixfold during the following 50 years, reaching 235,702 in the 1928 national census, a change which largely mirrors an emerging trend towards nation-wide urbanisation. The city's rural fringes began to be transformed into paved avenues and residential neighbourhoods, with the result that the urbanised area more than tripled during this period. This demographic and spatial

expansion, which is often considered as marking the beginning of the transition of Bogotá from a "village" to a "modern metropolis", also consolidated the city as the country's financial, political and demographic centre.[1]

Bogotá's fast pace of urban growth, however, strikingly contrasted with its geographical isolation from the rest of Colombia, one of its most distinctive features from the time the city was founded in 1538. Although it was finally connected in 1909 by rail to the Magdalena River by means of the Girardot railroad –a 132-kilometre line through the rugged Andean topography whose construction took nearly 30 years-, its communication with most of the country's main cities continued to depend on the nineteenth century's precarious and torturous trail network. Even in 1934, when the national government had already begun to shift its transport policy from railroads to road and highway construction, the country's railroad network –largely comprised of short and unconnected lines- barely surpassed 3,000 kilometres, with the exception of Venezuela the shortest railway length per capita of Latin America.[2] In addition, the first roads, which began to be built during the 1900s, consisted mostly of narrow dirt routes which followed the paths of the old republican trails –themselves inherited from colonial times- and lacked any technical design.

Against this backdrop, the observation made by an American scholar who studied the country's transport modernising policies during the 1930 and 1940s comes as little surprise. Whilst noting that the Bogotá of the early 1920s was one of the most isolated capitals in the world, he observed that the "towering mountain ranges which enveloped the people limited their outlook and restricted their movement, while the plodding pace of the mule seemed to set the tempo of their life".[3] Nevertheless, this peculiar form of myopia, particularly acute amongst the creole elites from Bogotá, did not solely stem from the fact that they were enclosed by "towering mountain ranges" blocking their view towards the neighbouring lowlands, not to mention the remote frontier territories of the country. More

[1] Misión Colombia, *Historia de Bogotá, Siglo XX*, Vol. III (Bogotá: Villegas Editores, 1988), 16-22.
[2] Alvaro Pachón and Maria Teresa Ramírez, *La infraestructura de transporte en Colombia durante el siglo XX* (Bogotá: *Fondo de Cultura Económica*, Banco de la República, 2006), 28-29.
[3] Donald *Barnhart*, "Colombian *transport* and the *reforms* of *1931:* an evaluation", *Hispanic American historical review*, Vol. 38, (1985): 1.

telling is the name won by the city in the late nineteenth century, the "Athens of South America", referring to the literary erudition of its elites, who imagined themselves more inclined to write and engage in conversations about poetry and philosophy than the harsh social reality faced by most Colombians.

In this "milieu", it might be expected that news brought from the peripheral regions would have an alluring effect on the cosmopolitan Bogotanos, who were far more familiar with Paris, London or New York than the Guajira, the Llanos or the Putumayo. Thus, that an event such as The National Congress of Missions celebrated in the capital in August 1924 did not pass unnoticed is not surprising. The Congress was preceded by a massive exhibition of indigenous objects gathered by the missionaries, as well as all kinds of objects –clothes, toys, ornaments- collected as donations for the Indians and missionaries. The two sections, according to a chronicle of the event, were remarkably tied by a linear timeline, the former incarnating the origins of "barbarism" and the latter the end of "civilisation".[4] However, the section which aroused more interest, and the one which made the exhibition a "noisy success", was the indigenous one. There, the public could not only appreciate the "primitive, rudimentary, backward and miserable state" of the indigenous tools, weapons and other objects, but marvel at the "products of a rich and exuberant nature" and the "progress obtained by the missionaries" on the indigenous children, "the hope of a promising and not far future".[5]

This preamble was followed by the Congress itself, one of the main aims of which was to offer public lectures about the challenges faced and the progress made by the Catholic missionaries scattered across the "Mission territories" -regions under jurisdiction of the Church-, which at the time encompassed about three quarters of the country. The most popular lectures consisted of "night sessions" in the Theatre Faenza –an *art nouveau* building inaugurated months before-, where the lecturers entertained the public –composed mostly of distinguished ladies and gentlemen from the capital- with tales and

[4] *Boletín de la Provincia de Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria de Colombia*, Vol. II, no.XXVII, Bogotá, (1924): 264.
[5] *Boletín de la Provincia,* 261.

photographic projections from the "savage" lands of Colombia. The enthusiastic chronicler, referring to the great success of these sessions, fervently stated that:

> Never had the Republic been known so well than in those memorable nights; those conferences were living lessons of geography, religion, national history; we can say that we visited personally those vast regions which form three quarters of the Republic; our eyes saw and our ears heard what exists and happens there.[6]

Among the speakers was the Catalan Capuchin friar Fidel de Montclar, Apostolic Prefect of the Putumayo and Caquetá.[7] Known for his energetic character and stern charisma, the 56 year old, white bearded Friar had been in charge of the Putumayo Mission for 20 years, almost as long as the Capuchins had been established in the region. His speech, suggestively entitled "What the Putumayo and Caquetá territories were before the creation of the Apostolic Prefecture; what they are nowadays, and what they can become", was basically a semi-fictional account of the "radical transformation" of the region brought about by the Catalan Mission.[8] Skilfully crafted, the story had as central characters two imaginary friars, a narrative artifice which allowed de Montclar to dramatise the history of two decades of the Mission in the Putumayo in the form of a short tale. And the beginning of this tale, not unexpectedly, was quite similar to Reyes' opening, years back in Mexico, of his epic adventure in the Putumayo: the dramatic crossing of the Andes mountain range -except in this case the tale's hero was not the megalomaniac explorer in chase of fortune, but the humble missionary in search of souls.

Leaving behind the city of Pasto, Fray de Montclar begins, two Capuchins riding on modest mounts through a craggy trail intermittently look towards a chain of mountains that is

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[6] *Boletín de la Provincia,* 265.

[7] The Apostolic Prefecture of the Putumayo and Caquetá, which at the time of its creation (1904) encompassed an extensive area (around 131,940 square km), comprised a part of the ancient *Territorio del Caquetá*, which gradually split into administrative units such as *Comisarías especiales* –special commissionerships- Intendancies and Departments. The term "Putumayo" will be used in this chapter to designate the territory encompassed by the Apostolic Prefecture. For a detailed historical account of the administrative and territorial changes of the Putumayo territory during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see Pacífico de Vilanova, *Capuchinos Catalanes en el sur de Colombia*, Vol.2 (Barcelona: Imprenta Myria, 1947), 131-139; *also* Domínguez et.al, *Geografía física,* 54-57; Ramírez, "El departamento", 203-239.

[8] Fidel de Montclar, *Conferencia leída por el Rvmo. P. Fr. Fidel de Montclar Prefecto Apostólico del Putumayo, en el Teatro Faenza, el día 20 de agosto de 1924, con motivo del Congreso Nacional de Misiones* (Bogotá: Casa Editorial Marconi, 1924).

perennially surrounded by dense fogs. Eventually, at the point where the road ends, they leave their mounts behind and begin the excruciating ascent of the ridge:

> In front of them, they have an imposing "cordillera" that they must cross to reach the Mission. They ask : Where is the gate? Which is the road? They are answered that they must open the road and force the gate. On the other side of those high summits, where every human consolation looks distant, a mysterious region is revealed. There, sadness and melancholy may settle; in those dismal cliffs, they even believe they can see written the sinister words Dante read at the gate of another fateful place. Hard is the test put to their missionary vocation.[9]

During the many hours of walking through the freezing páramo -continues Fray de Montclar-, their feet bleeding, stiff with cold and stunned by rain and wind, the exhausted monks "attempt with extraordinary effort to overcome the barrier which separates two worlds: the civilised and the savage".[10] And then, when they finally begin to descend the opposed slope of the cordillera, "they glimpse, not the promised land where honey and milk flows, but an incommensurable and tangled forest where the puma and the jaguar, in partnership with enormous and poisonous snakes, dispute the domain of those uncultured lands with the Indians".[11]

In his despair, one of the friars sits on the trunk of a gigantic fallen tree, and from there he strives to make sense of the vast country given to him as mission territory. He anxiously browses through some documents he has brought with him and which narrate the numerous failed missions there in previous centuries. He also takes a look to Reyes' story, admires his tenacity and endurance, and is struck by the courage of other *caucheros* – rubber tappers- who, like the famed explorer, went into the forest, dominated the "ferocious tribes of cannibals" and extracted huge quantities of rubber. Then -leaving aside the documents- the friar wonders:

> What curse lies over this fateful land for so many sacrifices, numerous trials and combined efforts to have failed? Nor the heroism and devotion of the missionaries, nor the adventurous spirit of the caucheros, have done anything: everything has *vanished like an*

[9] Montclar*, Conferencia,* 5-6.
[10] Montclar*, Conferencia,* 6.
[11] Montclar*, Conferencia,* 7.

> *illusion*, and the Caquetá and Putumayo have been again wrapped in the shadows of a dark night without any sign of the dawn of a beautiful day! [12]

Nevertheless, and despite this gloomy picture, the prostrated friar does not give up. He makes projects and plans new excursions: he traverses swamps, wades across turbulent rivers, sleeps under the trees, opens trails with a machete through the dense forest. And then, after months of deprivations and perils, he finally finds an indigenous tribe. Many of the Indians are totally naked and the friar doesn't speak their language. But he knows that in order for the "light of faith" to shine in those "dark minds" he has to adapt to the hostile nature of the jungle. He eventually does –yet not without great difficulty- and begins to harvest the seeds he planted with so much effort in that "infertile soil".

Friar Fidel de Montclar (Source: ADS).

A few years have passed, the Prefect tells us, and the "sole of the missionary has trodden the jungle in every direction, and the sweat of his brow and the tears of his eyes have

[12] Montclar*, Conferencia,* 8 (emphasis added).

fertilised those solitudes".[13] New missionaries have come to join him, and with their joint efforts the Mission has begun to flourish: new towns are founded, a few churches and schools are built, and the gospel is rapidly spreading among the natives. However, warns Montclar, although the Mission's progress has marked the beginning of "a radical transformation in those jungles", a barrier of steep mountains, deep marshes and icy *páramos* keeps this territory isolated from the civilised world. If for any reason, he wonders, the missionaries would have to abandon the Putumayo, all their efforts so far would be in vain. Thus, and evoking the Capuchin's major achievement in Putumayo, he reaches the climax of the story:

> It is necessary, then, to overcome the impossible: the mountains have to be flattened, the rocks blown, and the cordilleras demolished. The age of miracles has not come to an end. The missionaries are transformed into sappers and the priests into engineers, and they undertake what had been deemed impossible: the opening of a road from Pasto to the Putumayo through the Andes, over icy páramos and granite mountains. The miracle happened, and the mountains were flattened, the valleys filled, the cliffs blown and the cordilleras opened.[14]

This passionate ode to the fused creative destructive power of Christian faith and dynamite, endorsed by celebratory quotes to the Capuchin's "prodigious work", marks a break in the Prefect's tale. What follows is largely a description of the Capuchin's achievements "once the mountains' fence that enclosed and isolated the Putumayo was broken": of how they founded agricultural colonies and promoted the colonisation throughout the region, established numerous schools and increased the number of missionaries, resuscitated Reyes' dream of opening a navigation route along the Putumayo River, and so forth. Approaching the end, in a passage that strongly reminds us of Reyes' flamboyant accounts of the Amazon forest, Montclar excited the audience by portraying the most exuberant future for the region, a future sustained by its 'grandiose' and 'vacant' nature. That portrait, he further declared –as if pretending to wake up a hypnotised crowd- "is not a fiction". Yet, in order for this promising future to come true and the illusion not to vanish, he concluded

[13] Montclar*, Conferencia,* 11.
[14] Montclar*, Conferencia,* 13.

by listing a number of required "means": first of all, that "Colombia does not neglect the material and moral support of the Mission".[15]

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There are three elements in Montclar's story that I would like to highlight as they are central for the purposes of this chapter. First, there is the circular logic in which the tale itself is immersed. As in the case of Reyes -although a quarter of a century later-, Montclar frames his story following a linear temporal pattern which clearly differentiates past, present, and future, a pattern marked by the strenuous yet inexorable transition of the Putumayo frontier from a state of "savagery" to one of "civilisation". Still, the tale has no ending. For, as Montclar emphatically warns us, without the Mission, no matter the "progress" accomplished so far, the fate of Putumayo faces an inescapable return to its aboriginal, "savage" state. As we shall see later, every time the Prefect saw the Mission's *status quo* or interests threatened, he appealed to that rhetoric formula in his letters and reports to the national government. Víctor Bonilla, in a book that strongly questioned the legacy of the Capuchin Mission in the Putumayo and unleashed a scandal of international proportions in the late 1960s, sharply captures the rationale behind the formula. In noting how Montclar often exalted the "savage" character of indigenous communities which –by the Republic's legal standards- had long been "civilised", he observed that, had the Prefect adopted a different posture, "he would have had to reconsider the whole basis of the Capuchin Mission's civilising action".[16]

I would like to relocate this rationale from the particular history and legacy of the Mission to the broader discussion about the relationship between frontier and state. As already discussed in the first chapter, it is in the perpetuation of the binary opposition between "civilisation" and "savagery" and other related binary oppositions that we find one of the essential elements within which the state's illusion of legitimacy is ultimately grounded and sustained. This is precisely the boundary-marking effect which Montclar's tale intends to

[15] Montclar*, Conferencia,* 23.
[16] Bonilla, *Servants,* 176.

achieve among the audience of the Faenza theatre. Put differently, by warning the public of the radical yet fragile civilising effect of Christian faith and material progress in the frontier, the tale also serves as a reminder that the boundary has to be maintained so that the civilising mission of the state –embodied here in figure of the Capuchin friars- can be preserved.

This leads us to a second element, namely the state-character that the Mission assumes throughout the tale. Not only does its central character appear as an abstract entity–an anonymous friar, although we know it alludes to the Capuchin Mission and more specifically to Montclar himself-, but he seems to act as a sovereign force in his quest to transform. Certainly, Montclar makes no single mention of any other kind of authority in the Putumayo and Caquetá other than the one exerted by the Mission. Just as in Reyes' depiction of the *Territorio del Caquetá* in the early 1870s as a *terra incognita*, the Prefect's omission might seem an overstatement. As already noted in the first chapter, the civil authorities, although negligible, were not absent from the Putumayo since the mid-nineteenth century. During the first two decades of the twentieth century –the period encompassed in Montclar's tale-, along with the missionaries, other state agents existed such as the *Comisario especial* –the principal civil authority-, a small police force and occasional military contingents sent due to the ongoing conflict with Peru. Yet, the great political, economic and spiritual power that the Capuchins had in the region during that period is hardly questionable. The political regime in force, which extended from 1886 to 1930 and was marked by the political hegemony of the Conservative Party, had granted ample authority and influence to the Catholic Church. For instance, the Concordat signed between the government and the Vatican in 1887 -and whose first article declares that the public powers recognise the Catholic religion as "a central element of the social order"-, officially recognised the privileges and influence of the Church within the new political order. Furthermore, government regulations such as the Law 89 of 1890 and Law 72 of 1892, stipulated that the ordinary laws of the republic did not apply amongst the "savages", who occupied roughly three quarters of the country. Those were left under the jurisdiction of the Catholic

missions, which in order to secure its "reduction to civilised life" would be given "extraordinary" civil, judicial, and criminal authority.[17]

The laws mentioned, together with other events which I shall come back to later, conferred great power to the Capuchin Mission. While this dominant *status quo* of the Mission is hardly ever overlooked in literature, the interpretations vary: some argue that the state "delegated" the task of "civilising" the indigenous peoples to the Mission or, more generally, that it was part of a state policy to integrate the Putumayo frontier into the nation;[18] others, that the missionaries basically filled a "power vacuum" left by the state, too weak to reach the remote regions of the country, otherwise deemed of little political and economic interest;[19] while others go on to say that Mission and state represented two antagonistic powers,[20] or even that the former took over the latter's monopoly of power and eventually became "a state within a state".[21] As the Mission actually appeared and acted variously as a state ally, emissary, or even adversary, these views are not necessarily exclusive. However, they all seem to conceive both entities as two separate and independent realms, or to assume the state as an abstract construction existing in an external relation to the material existence of the Mission.

The view I am proposing is different. I would like to suggest that we cannot consider the geographical and historical process of state-making in the Putumayo frontier without conceiving the Mission as an inherent element of this process. This argument is basically grounded upon two ideas discussed in the previous chapter: first, that in studying the state we have to move beyond universalising categories where the state is conceived as a pre-existing and self-contained entity, and account for the multiple discursive and material practices through which is it daily configured, performed, and subverted. Secondly, that

[17] For a detailed description of the government regulations and agreements pertaining to the Catholic Missions in the context of the conservative hegemony see Vilanova, *Capuchinos Catalanes,* 103-115; Bonilla, *Servants,* 52-60.
[18] Gómez, *Putumayo*, 205; Zárate, *Silvícolas,* 185; Fajardo, "Fronteras, colonizaciones", 264.
[19] Brücher, *La colonización,* 34-35; Palacios, *Between Legitimacy,* 74; Palacio, *Fiebre,* 119.
[20] Justo Casas, *Evangelio y Colonización. Una aproximación a la historia del Putumayo desde la época prehispánica hasta el presente* (Bogotá: Ecoe, 1999), 212-216.
[21] Bonilla, *Servants*, 212.

upon addressing the relationship between state and frontier, we have to pay special attention to the different actors -and the rhetoric structures they incarnate and reproduce- through which this "inclusive exclusive" relationship has been historically and spatially configured. Thus, and as in the case of Reyes, it is precisely in this sense that the Capuchin missionaries are addressed here: as personifications or expressions of certain "hegemonic" narratives and practices through which this relationship is produced and reproduced.

A third element I would like to highlight is the central role that the road plays in the tale. In fact, its whole plot, framed around this single event, tells how in breaking a *spatial* barrier –the abrupt Andean cordillera-, the road simultaneously overcomes a *temporal* one –that between "savagery" and "civilisation". Montclar, moreover, insistently warns us that the "miracle" of the road is not an "illusion", and in doing so he portrays it as path-breaking event in the history of the Putumayo. What the Prefect does not tell his audience, is how far the actual history of the Capuchin road is from the tale. Yet, as in Reyes' map, the crucial aspect of Montclar's tale lies not so much in how fictitious or real it is, but in the effect by which the "fiction" acquires an *illusion of reality.* When looking at the history of the road, to which I now turn, I suggest that it is only by considering this effect that we can grasp fully the significance of this history within the broader historical geography of state and frontier.

The General's last sigh

The tragic events that marked the end of the Reyes Brothers' Company in the Putumayo in the early 1880s did not persuade the young Rafael to give up his dream of opening a route linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. So, two decades later, now president, he not only resuscitated the transoceanic project; the way he assumed it –more as a personal quest than a government plan- indicates that he was determined to realise it. Well aware that the project's main obstacle had always been the steep mountains hindering the access to the Putumayo lowlands, the General focused his energies in overcoming the infamous "Andean barrier". Thus, during his first year of government, he commissioned Miguel Triana, an engineer from Bogotá, to study the best route to build a road from the Andean city of Pasto to La Sofía, the small port he had founded on the banks of the Putumayo back in the 1870s.

Triana spent the first half of 1906 in the Putumayo and wrote an extensive account of his expedition in a book dedicated to Reyes, whom he honoured with the title of "the distinguished explorer of the Caquetá".[22] Nevertheless Triana, a liberal from the capital's elite, unlike Reyes, was not a fervent devotee of the Spanish friars, about whom he commented with scorn that "their hearts are full of hatred against the Republic and lack of love for the country".[23] Thus, the engineer was not persuaded by the Capuchin friars he met in Mocoa and whom, he said, insistently begged him to recommend to the government a route through this town and the Sibundoy valley. In fact, in the final report submitted to the Minister of Public Works, Triana made a detailed analysis of the possible routes, leaving the one passing through Mocoa –a "ruined village" in his view- as the least attractive option in terms of costs.[24]

Triana might have underestimated the anxious appeals of the missionaries. Just a few days had passed since he presented his report when the Minister got a letter from Julián Bucheli, governor of Pasto and close friend of Montclar.[25] In the letter, Bucheli persuasively lobbied for the Sibundoy route, arguing that others, although shorter, would pass through "entirely deserted regions". The former, on the contrary -he added-, in connecting Pasto (capital of Nariño) with the densely populated Sibundoy valley, offered two indisputable advantages: first, it would encourage the colonisation of the valley, thus putting its "semi-savage" inhabitants in contact with the peoples of Nariño; secondly, as the Capuchins had assured him, the same Indians would be an abundant source of "free labour" for the road.[26]

Whether Bucheli's missive influenced the Minister or there were other interests at stake is hard to say. The fact is that Triana, who according to the Decree that set the terms of his contract was expected to proceed with the layout of the road once he concluded his

[22] Miguel Triana, *Por el sur de Colombia. Excursión pintoresca y científica al Putumayo* (Bogotá: Prensa del Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 1950 [1907]).
[23] Triana*, Por el sur,* 86.
[24] "Informe sobre camino de Nariño al Puerto de La Sofía", 21 Aug 1906, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.30-37v.
[25] Putumayo remained under the jurisdiction of the Nariño province until 1912, the year that it was established as a *Comisaría especial* depending directly on the central government.
[26] Bucheli to MOP, 7 Sept 1906, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.28-29v.

survey,[27] got lost from the picture. Therefore, and with Triana's report rendered useless, the project was halted. The restless president, however, reacted soon after this failed attempt. Through a series of hasty telegrams to Bucheli, he recommended new engineers, allocated resources, and above all urged to start the construction of the road without delay, repeatedly stating its crucial importance both commercially and in terms of national sovereignty.[28]

In February 1907, and after two other engineers had refused the job, a contract for the complete design and construction of the road was finally signed. The contract, final approval of which took another two months, stipulated that the road should pass through the Sibundoy valley.[29] Although it took the new contractor -Víctor Triana[30]- a whole year to design the complete route, he only concluded a small section of the layout, basically consisting of a one metre width trail and some forest clearing around it.[31] However, and contradicting the recommendations made by Miguel Triana two years earlier, from Sibundoy to La Sofía he chose the route through Mocoa (see map 6). Reyes, meanwhile, grumbled from Bogotá about the slow pace of the works. Without hiding his frustration, in January 1908 he wrote a telegram to Bucheli in which he declared: "With regret, I note that too little has been done at a great price".[32] He was probably right and yet, his dictatorial voice, as well as his government, had already begun to weaken. So, when in May of that same year a Presidential agreement suddenly decreed that the road works should be suspended indefinitely due to the lack of funds,[33] it is quite likely that there was little that the General could say or do. In June 1909, his dream unfulfilled, Reyes went into exile and would not return until 1918. As for his cherished port of La Sofía, according to his main biographer, it would soon be erased from the country's official map.[34]

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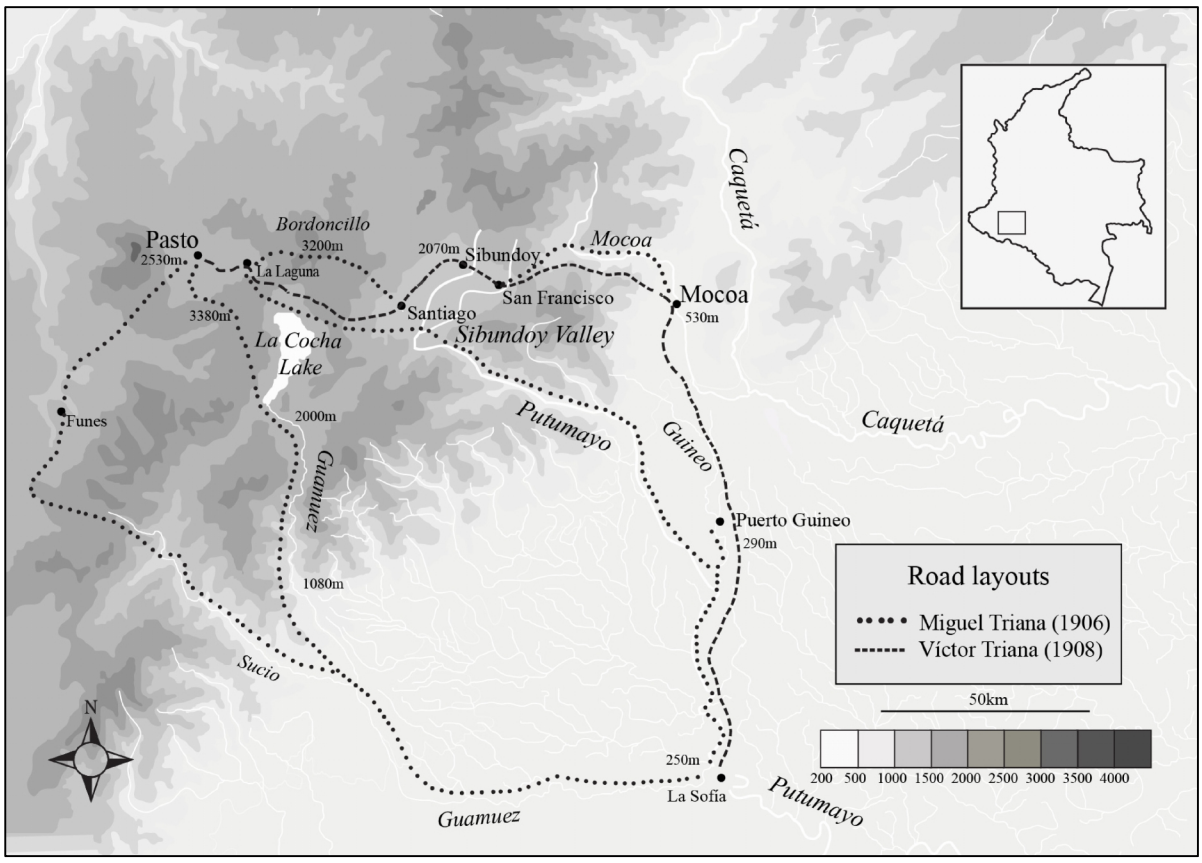
[27] "Decreto número 302 de 1905", 27 Dec 1905, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.8-10v.
[28] Reyes to Bucheli, Nov. 1906, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.39-40, 70-72, 63-66.
[29] "Contrato", 25 Feb. 1907, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.100v.
[30] As far as we know, Víctor and Miguel Triana were not relatives and they came from different parts of Colombia.
[31] "Informe de Víctor Triana sobre el trazado de la vía entre Pasto y el Putumayo", May 1908, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.173-177v.
[32] Reyes to Bucheli, 9 Jan 1908, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.133.
[33] "Acuerdo Presidencial XVIII", 26 May 1908, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.154.
[34] Lemaitre, *Rafael Reyes,* 363.

Map 6. Road layouts, 1906-1908[35]



The odyssey

"There is where the power of man and the force of dynamite can be best appreciated". [36]

By mid 1909, and after three years of surveys, unfinished contracts and bureaucratic delays, the road project had not progressed much beyond the few kilometres of abandoned narrow trail left by Víctor Triana. The intrigue to decide the route, however, had exposed an underlying political economy where different interests converged. That the Capuchin route though Sibundoy and Mocoa ended up prevailing is not surprising. For, neither Reyes the "explore*r*" -obsessed with the idea that the road should reach La Sofía- nor the "statesman" –aware of its strategic value to exercise sovereignty over a territory in dispute with Peru-

[35] Elaborated by the autor, based on Triana, *Por el sur de Colombia*, 381-391; AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.167.
[36] Rufino Gutiérrez, *Monografías de Rufino Gutiérrez. Caquetá y Putumayo (Informes oficiales del procurador de hacienda. Caquetá y Putumayo, 1912)*, Vol. II (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1921), 340.

concerned much about the actual route, as long as the road was done. Most of Nariño's economic and political elite, attracted by the lands of the Sibundoy valley and the commercial and extractive opportunities offered by the future road, saw in the Catalan Mission a natural ally to pursue their own interests. Still, if to the former the road largely meant a long awaited gateway to a promised land of inexhaustible resources, to the latter it represented a vital condition to accomplish their civilising mission.

As early as 1893, when the first Capuchin expedition to the Putumayo took place, the difficult access was perceived and experienced as the biggest nightmare to the foreign catechumens. Angel Villava, who took part of the referred expedition, kept a journal where he described in detail the hardships they suffered crossing the *páramo* of Bordoncillo and the steep trail from the Sibundoy Valley to Mocoa. "In this rich and fertile country" –he wrote whilst noting that its major problem was the lack of roads - "there is no sign of progress: everything remains the same or even worse than one or two centuries ago".[37] A decade later, when the Capuchins had already established the Mission's headquarters in Sibundoy and the Apostolic Prefecture of the Putumayo had been erected –in December 20, 1904- the situation had barely improved. Fray Jacinto de Quito, who arrived in 1903 and remained with the Mission for more than 50 years, devoted a chapter of his memoirs to describe the travel conditions during its early times. Suggestively entitled "On Indian's back", he observed that in order to traverse the Bordoncillo, it was "imperative" to resort to the "very ancient method" of riding on the backs of the Sibundoy Indians, for it was "materially impossible" to employ beasts of burden on those trails. The brunt, he added, was to be borne not by the carrier or "sillero" but his passenger, since the former "walked calm and content, thinking only of the fee he would be paid, and willing to repeat the same trip for a thousandth time".[38]

[37] Angel Villava, *Una visita al Caquetá por un misionero capuchino* (Barcelona: Librería y tipografía Católica, 1895), 14.
[38] Jacinto M. de Quito, *Miscelánea de mis treinta y cinco años de Misionero del Caquetá y Putumayo*, Part I (Bogotá: Editorial Aguila, 1938), 25-27.

Indian trail, Putumayo (n.d.; Source: ADS).

As noted in the first chapter, the Andes' rugged topography never represented a barrier to the native inhabitants of the highlands, the foothills or the lowlands, who for a long time had maintained an active cultural and economic exchange. Their intricate system of paths and trails, moreover, acted also as a mechanism of resistance, not only facilitating the evasion of authority but also hindering the access of foreigners to their territory. The Putumayo indigenous peoples seem to have been very conscious of this, even by the time the Capuchins had been established there for a while. Hence, Miguel Triana, who on his way back to Pasto took the trail from Mocoa to Sibundoy, mentioned how his "Indian carrier" followed a trail through the left margin of the Mocoa River, much more rugged and longer than the one opened by the "whites" on its other margin. The Indians, pointed out Triana, following the "tradition of their ancestors", intentionally discarded the whites' trail.[39] Yet Montclar, well aware that a road would do much more than aiding the access of a few missionaries to the vast territory under his jurisdiction, was pretty conscious of this too.

[39] Triana, *Por el sur,* 356-357, 384-385.

In 1909, and witnessing how Reyes' project had been wrecked, the energetic Prefect wrote a long letter to the Minister of Government. The document, which as with many of his writings constitutes a fine work of rhetoric, imbued the road with a paramount significance where its many attributes appeared masterly entwined: national sovereignty, colonisation, access to boundless riches, civilisation, and so forth.[40] The road, moreover -he reassured the Minister-, did not require "major sacrifices" to the nation, as it was "one of the easiest works to accomplish". Thus, he mentioned how without any financial assistance, the missionaries themselves had opened –with the help of some Indians they had "induced" to work- more than 50 kilometres of road between the Sibundoy valley and Pasto. "What would have we accomplished with an aid from the government?" -he asked the Minister- while at the same time assured that with a contribution of $40,000 pesos the Mission would finish the road to Sibundoy and also open the section from there to Mocoa. Yet, and in order to stress the derisory character of the amount requested, the Prefect finished with an admonitory message: as chief of the Mission, main ecclesiastic authority of Putumayo and Caquetá and "lover of Colombia's integrity", he asked the Minister "to inform the Nation of the imminent danger it faces of losing those rich and beautiful territories".

It took the Minister less than a month to get Montclar's request approved. Through the Resolution number 21 of September 1909, the government commissioned the Governor of Nariño to control and oversee the funds for the road, and appointed Montclar as General Director of Works. The latter, absent at that moment, promptly delegated the task to his colleague Estanislao de Las Corts, and the works began in October 25.

The friars soon faced the problem of finding labourers. The Mission, as the Prefect had stated to the Minister in his letter, had certainly initiated the construction of a road from Pasto to Sibundoy three years before, in 1906. In November of that year, Montclar had printed a pamphlet in Pasto entitled "The savages of Caquetá, Putumayo, and the road to

[40] Fray de Montclar to Minister of Government, 2 Sep.1909, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.194-198v.

Mocoa", in which he appealed to public charity to collect funds for the works.[41] According to the Prefect, since the amount gathered did not reach the $200 pesos needed, the missionaries had no choice but to undertake the project themselves, resorting to the "tributary work" of the indigenous of the Sibundoy valley and La Laguna, an indigenous town in the outskirts of Pasto. This form of compulsory labour, which basically consisted of the obligation of indigenous communities under the tutelage of the Mission to work for free certain days a month, did not cease when the government began funding the construction of the road. That this practice actually intensified is evidenced by the fact that a few weeks after the works had been initiated, and due to the recurrent claims of the Indians, the provincial government of Nariño issued a resolution forbidding the Mission to make use of this system for the road.[42] Although it was now possible for the Mission to hire full-time workers, the scarcity of non-indigenous labour in the area made things even more difficult for the friars, who now had to send commissioners to recruit them from distant parts.[43] Montclar went even further and published the job in the press through encouraging letters describing the abundance of vacant lands and colonisation opportunities across the region.[44]

In order to facilitate the labour recruiting and the organisation of the works, the Capuchins devised a method that consisted of dividing the whole route into several sub-sections, and then assigning each of them to a "caporal" (foreman). The caporal, meanwhile, was responsible for hiring a crew of 20 to 30 workers, arranging wages, and providing food – sold to him by a general supplier contracted by the Mission- and shelter if required.[45] The General Inspector or one of his friar assistants, on the other hand, supervised the works constantly, and sent periodical reports to the Minister of Publics Works in Bogotá and to the Governor of Nariño.

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[41] The complete pamphlet can be found in the Mission's annual report of 1912. *Las Misiones en Colombia. Obra de los misioneros Capuchinos en el Caquetá y Putumayo* (Bogotá: Imprenta de la Cruzada, 1912), 115-117.

[42] "Resolución No.264. Gobernación Departamento. Pasto, 17 Nov.1909", APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 4, n.f.

[43] De Las Corts to Minister of Public Works, 22 Jan.1910, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.262-264.

[44] "Camino de Oriente", *La Renovación* (No. 309, Bogotá), 9 January 1911.

[45] Gutiérrez, *Monografías,* 344.

Road crew (c.1910, Source: APCC).

De Las Corts spent the first year working on the section from Sibundoy to Pasto, mostly reconstructing and finishing the trail the Mission had initiated years before. The most difficult part, as expected, would be the eight-kilometre stretch through the páramo of Bordoncillo, at 3,200 metres above sea level. The cold temperatures, constant rains and remoteness, forced the suspension of the works on various occasions. However, by the end of 1910, the friar submitted a very optimistic report. So far, summarised Fray de Las Corts, of the total 57 kilometres composing this section, 33 had been concluded, another 17 where already contracted or under construction, and just about 6 –in the páramo- were still to be contracted. The road dimensions, he added, were the same at the top of the cordillera as in the Valley: four metres wide plus another 48 (24 on each side) of forest clearing. Now that this part was nearly concluded, he informed the Minister, his plan was to delegate its

supervision to another friar, while he would devote his energies to the Sibundoy-Mocoa section so as to "break as soon as possible that wall that separates us from the capital of the territory".[46]

Road crew demolishing a rock cliff (n.d.; Source: APCC)

The 54 kilometres separating the town of San Francisco (2,190 metres) in the easternmost part of the Valley to the town of Mocoa (600 metres) proved to be a real challenge for the stubborn friars. In January 1910, Fray de Las Corts had carried out a short expedition with the aim of studying the best route, and reported to the Governor of Nariño that "the ruggedness of the terrain, the innumerable creeks and inaccessible cliffs" had kept him and other ten workers six and a half weeks in the mountain.[47] Of the two existent trails, the indigenous one described by Miguel Triana and the one opened decades before by the

[46] "Informe de los trabajos del camino del Oriente", 30 Oct. 1910, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.323-328v.
[47] "Oficial no.2. Informe de los trabajos del camino de Oriente al gobernador del Departamento", March 1910, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.290-292v.

caucheros from Nariño –known as "La Tortuga" (The Tortoise)- the Capuchins chose the latter as the base route for the road. Although this was the shortest and less abrupt route, it had a considerable limitation: a significant portion of the road would have to be literally carved out of granite rocks.

The Capuchins needed three things to realise the dream so ceaselessly invoked by Montclar of breaking the immemorial wall separating the "civilised" and "savage" worlds: additional funds, more workers, and abundant dynamite. The first limitation would be unexpectedly solved thanks to a fateful event. By mid-1911, just when the budget initially requested by Montclar had exhausted and the missionaries were forced to fire 300 workers –of a total of 450- and borrowed a loan to cover debts,[48] the Peruvian army attacked a Colombian military garrison stationed in La Pedrera, a customs post on the Caquetá River. The incident, apart from fulfilling Montclar's prophesies, lent evidence to the obvious: the country's lack of accessible routes to its extensive and neglected Amazon frontier. A sad epitome of this drama, the defeated Colombian military expedition had spent four months reaching La Pedrera from Bogotá, having to descend the Magdalena River to the Caribbean, and from there navigate all the way round to the mouth of the Amazon and then upstream toward the Caquetá.[49] For the Capuchin monks, however, this event was like a blessing. On August 1911, barely a month after the battle of La Pedrera, the National Congress approved an additional budget of $36,000 pesos, and gave the explicit instruction of employing no less than one thousand labourers on the works.[50]

With money flowing again and a paranoid government putting pressure from Bogotá by means of telegrams and letters to the Apostolic Prefect, the works soon acquired a frenetic rhythm. De Las Corts hurried to get tools, provisions and workers wherever he could find them. By the end of the year, an inspector sent by the Governor of Nariño reported that, between Sibundoy and Mocoa, there were currently 1,238 workers distributed in five

[48] AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.410.
[49] For a detailed description of La Pedrera military expedition see Luis Forero, *La Pedrera: relato del combate entre colombianos y peruanos en el año de 1911* (Bogotá: Editorial Bolívar, 1928).
[50] AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.414; "Camino del Putumayo. Su pronta terminación", 18 Oct. 1911, *Gaceta Republicana* No.676, Bogotá, in APCC, Miss Caquetá-Putumayo, Press, fol.87.

sections, but mentioned that in the previous months those came to exceed the 1,500 -an average of 25 per kilometre-. The inspector, General Joaquín Escandón -who would later be involved in a fierce confrontation with Montclar- extolled the missionaries for the economy and organisation of the works, stating that their involvement in the project was "indisputably decisive in its success".[51] Montclar, meanwhile, faced a hard time getting explosives. As soon as the funds had been approved, he had ordered 25 "quintales" (1,150 kilograms) of dynamite from Panama through the Ministry of Public Works. However, as the weeks passed and the precious material didn't arrive, the frantic friar went so far as to write directly to the President imploring him to send a telegram to Nariño telling the Governor to lend the Mission eight boxes of dynamite stored in Pasto.[52] The desperate measure might have been justified, for the explosives from Panama did not arrive until three months later, on February 1912.[53]

Crew working on the San Francisco-Mocoa section (c.1911; Source: ADS, GT)

[51] Escandón to Secretary of Treasure (Nariño), 31 Dec.1911, ADS, folder 11-10-01, Camino Pasto a Puerto Asís, nf.
[52] Fray de Montclar to President, 26 Nov.1911, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.461-462.
[53] Fray de Montclar to Minister of Public Works, 23 Feb.1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.507.

In November 27, 1911, Fray de Las Corts sent an 87-word telegram to Montclar in Pasto announcing the near conclusion of the works and his triumphal entrance to Mocoa. "Enthusiasm Mocoanos unprecedented" –reads a fragment of the hasty note- "authorities, missionaries, people, with national flag received us, flower arcs, music, shotguns…willing spirits stick flag and cross confines Colombian territory".[54] Three days later, Gustavo Guerrero, Governor of Nariño, sent another telegram to the President confirming Fray de Las Corts' news and notifying the discovery of a "rich marble mine" in the road area.[55] And on December first, Montclar, joyful, wrote a letter to the Minister of Public Works officially announcing the good news:

> I offered the government to finish the road to Mocoa this year. I have the pleasure to inform your Excellency that the conclusion of the road is a fact as there are only two and a half leagues left and they will be most likely concluded before the year ends, because there are currently one thousand two hundred labourers (1,200) working with extraordinary activity...The missionaries, committed to the civilisation of the Caquetá and Putumayo, to the prosperity and progress of that region, and seeking that Colombia, which gallantly protects the Missions, does not lose that vast territory, have worked tirelessly in the construction of a road that eases Colombia's maintenance of her rights over that region.[56]

According to an official report published by the end of 1912, it took the Capuchins six and a half months –from September 1911 to March 1912- to build the section from Minchoy (a few kilometres from San Francisco) to Mocoa.[57] Apart from the daily labour of about 1,500 indigenous and non-indigenous workers, the 50-kilometre-long, 3-metre-wide road had consumed, according to Fray de Montclar, 3,220 kg of dynamite, not counting "great quantities of ordinary explosives".[58]

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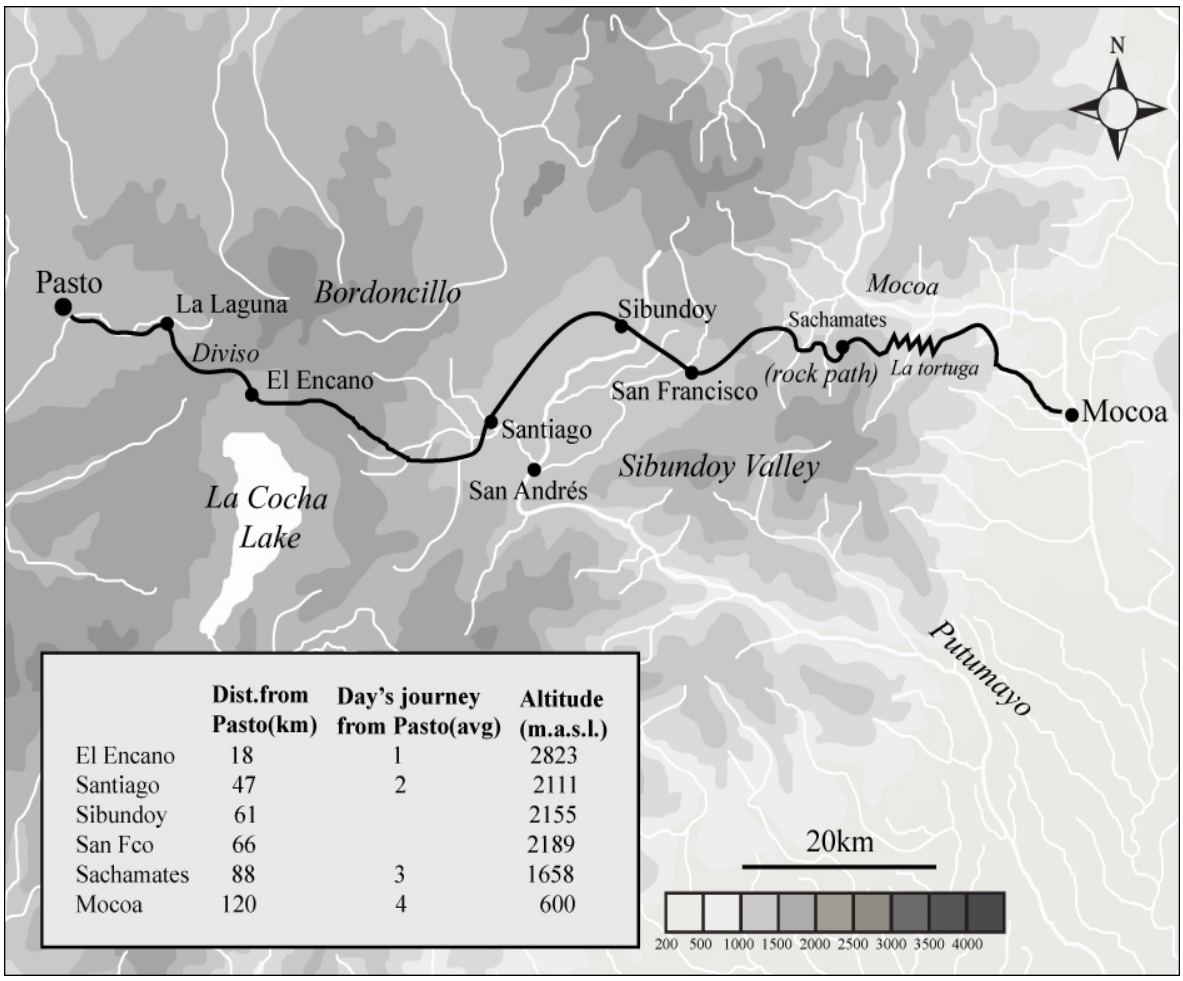
[54] Fray de Las Corts to Fray de Montclar, 27 Nov.1911, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.458-459.
[55] "Camino a Mocoa", *El Nuevo Tiempo*, 30 Nov. 1911, year X, No.3221, in APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Press, n.f.
[56] Fray de Montclar to Minister of Public Works, 1 Dec.1911, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.467.
[57] *Camino de Pasto a Puerto Asís. Relación de viaje. Informe de la Comisión nombrada por el Gobierno Departamental de Nariño para inspeccionar la vía*, Imprenta del Departamento, Pasto, 1912, in APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 3, nf.
[58] Fray de Montclar to Minister of Public Works, 20 Feb.1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.526v.

Map 7. The Capuchin road, 1912[59]



	Dist.from Pasto(km)	Day's journey from Pasto(avg)	Altitude (m.a.s.l.)
El Encano	18	1	2823
Santiago	47	2	2111
Sibundoy	61		2155
San Fco	66		2189
Sachamates	88	3	1658
Mocoa	120	4	600

Rituals of state-making

It is in the realm of the symbolic production that the grip of the state is felt most powerfully.[60]

The culmination of the 120 kilometre section from Pasto to Mocoa filled the Capuchins with all sorts of eulogies and adulatory expressions on the part of civil and military authorities who visited the new road. The Treasury Prosecutor, for instance, submitted a detailed report to the Minister of Public Works where he praised the economy and organisation of the works. He couldn't hide his amazement at the Sibundoy-Mocoa section, and declared that "never in Colombia had a road like that been built, in less time, expenditure, and

[59] Elaborated by the author, based on "Croquis del camino de Pasto a Moca construido por los R.R.P.P. Capuchinos", 13 May 1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408 (n.f.); AGN, MOP, Vol.1415, fols.62-65.
[60] Pierre Bourdieu, "Rethinking the state: genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field", *Sociological Theory*, Vol.12, No.1, (1994): 2.

without fanfare".[61] Lucio Velasco, an Army Division Commander sent to Putumayo following the incident at La Pedrera, commented to the Minister of War that the road was of "great importance to the army as well as for the country in general, in light of the current circumstances". [62] The army officer was especially impressed by the road at the páramo of Bordoncillo, which he described as a "titans' work", an epithet Montclar found particularly pleasing and would quote repeatedly.

The road, Sachamates-Cerreños section (n.d; Source: APCC)

[61] Gutiérrez, *Monografías*, 340.
[62] Velasco to Minister of War, 13 Sept.1912, AGN, MRE, Diplomática y Consular, Box 742, folder 323, fols.27-29v.

Yet, no celebration of the Catalan missionaries' accomplishment can be compared with the inauguration event which took place in March 1912. We have a detailed account of this event thanks to the General Inspector of the road, General Joaquín Escandón, who wrote a journal -published as a booklet by the official printing office of Nariño- describing the four-day journey of the official commission designated to receive the road.[63] Although the journal abounds in laudatory comments to the Capuchins, what captured Escandón's attention most, and to which he devoted more pages of his chronicle, were the exuberant receptions the commission was given in the towns along the road. The scene would be reproduced almost identically: first, the loud sound of rockets and the town's music band would welcome the delegation and announce its arrival, before they were directed to the "plaza" (central square); there, in the middle of palm arches and cheers to the government, the Mission, and the road, they would be met by a parade composed of indigenous peoples (such as in La Laguna, Santiago and Sibundoy), "colono" settlers (San Francisco), or both (Mocoa). This enthusiastic greeting would be followed by a scheduled programme, generally opened by the national anthem and flag-raising, and followed by solemn speeches on the part of the delegates, the missionaries and the local authorities. However, the General Inspector describes the speeches read by indigenous children from the Mission's schools as the most emotive acts of the ceremony. Likely written by the friars themselves but performed by a diligent pupil so as to offer the delegates an indisputable proof of the progress achieved by the Mission, their content was invariably the same: an exalted ode to the Mission in which the indigenous boy or girl praised the friars –predominantly the Apostolic Prefect- for having redeemed them from the state of "savagery" and "backwardness" which they inhabited until not long before.

[63] *Informe sobre la terminación del Camino de Mocoa*, Imprenta del Departamento, Pasto, 1912, in APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Miscellany, nf.

Inauguration ceremony in Santiago, March 10th, 1912 (Source: APCC)

After four days of travel and many hours spent in the ceremonies organised by the Mission, the Commission finally arrived at Mocoa in the afternoon of the 13th of March. The inauguration event in Mocoa would be the most symbolic one, not only because it was the conclusion of the journey but mainly since this place marked the point where the road culminated its strenuous passage through the Andes. There, as if the delegates were conquerors returning from a long heroic deed, apart from the music, rockets and cheers, they were greeted by a girl wearing a "nymph" costume who offered them graceful crowns. The official ceremony took place on the 14th and was opened by a mass officiated by Fray Fidel de Montclar, dubbed by Escandón as "the alma mater of this redemptive enterprise [the road]". Afterwards, with the crowd gathered in the plaza, the Apostolic Prefect gave a short speech in which he said he hoped the missionaries' accomplishment would be "the precursor of an age of uninterrupted happiness and progress for the Nation", and with these words officially handed the road over to the Governor of Nariño and delegate of the President, General Gustavo Guerrero.

The Governor's speech, a short but dense talk overloaded with flattering superlatives to the Catalan missionaries –variously called "titans", "modern evangelisers", and "sons of Colombia"-, marked the culmination of the event. The entrenched *spatial* metaphor of the Andean "undefeatable wall" was invoked again by the Governor as to preface the friars' epopee, and its final defeat by "pick, drill, and dynamite" to signal the *temporal* passage from savagery to civilisation and progress; and so the road, though an inert stretch of dirt, came to life in the speech as an active agent driving the pace of change, for -in his own words- "it makes a steady way to trade, agriculture, industry and, in short, to the movement of an enormous wealth, stagnant for centuries". When the Governor had concluded and got off the platform improvised for the occasion, recounts Escandón, he was greeted with the warm ovation of the attendees, the national anthem, and a rifle salute by the guard of honour. Finally, after two more brief interventions –by Fray de Las Corts and Rogerio Becerra, the civil Prefect-, the inauguration was officially closed at noon, though -notes the Inspector- the delegates continued receiving manifestations of gratitude during the rest of the day while the "populace" enjoyed a beef meal offered by the Mission and the government.

Inauguration ceremony in Mocoa, March 14th, 1912 (Delegates shown at centre. Source: ADS, GT)

"Triumphal entrance of the Governor and the Apostolic Prefect to San Francisco", March 12, 1912 (Source: APCC)

The picture above shows the Commission entering the town of San Francisco, the colonist town funded by the Capuchins in 1902. The delegates (on horseback, from left to right: General Gustavo Guerrero, Fray Fidel de Montclar, Fray Estanislao de Las Corts, General Joaquín Escandón) listen attentively to a speech read by a peasant boy (barefoot, centre), while the town's musical band, other children holding palm branches and the national flag (right), and some spectators (background) witness the solemn event. This particular moment is not recorded in Escandón's journal, and the picture comes from a different source. Yet, if we consider that the different reception ceremonies had been carefully planned by the missionaries and were replicated in different places, one can imagine this same picture and the others displayed repeated various times during the Commission's journey.

I would like to stress both the solemnity conveyed by the picture and the replication of the moment it captures, for it is here that one of the central features of the inauguration, namely its *ritualistic character*, is plainly revealed. The ritual, moreover, although revolving around a single episode –the inauguration of the road- was by no means restricted to it. For, as noted by Montclar, the road was largely conceived as the "precursor" to a "radical transformation" or, as he depicted it in his lecture at the Faenza theatre, as a landmark signalling a transcendental break in the history of the Putumayo. This was precisely what the whole event was about: not so much to celebrate the road itself, but to expose and perform, through all the solemnity in which the ritual was embedded, its manifold *effects* on the Putumayo frontier.

We might deconstruct the images and the Inspector's chronicle in order to dissect the whole ritual into discernible parts, thus identifying the meanings embodied in the different symbols and elements –the cross, the flag, the anthems, the parades, the protocols followed- that together mirror an important dimension of state-building. Still, rather than emphasising how the state is produced and enacted through the performative nature of the ritual, I would like to examine the ritual in its capacity to render visible the myth in which the state is rooted. Therefore, at this point we must ask why, *through* ritual, does a lifeless infrastructure metamorphise into a living actor over-saturated with nationalistic, religious, and economic meaning? The answer, I suggest, lies not so much in the omnipresent image of the road as marking the "defeat" of the granite "wall" that kept the Putumayo frontier -with all its buried treasures and souls to conquer- isolated for centuries, as in what this image conjures up, and what is ultimately ritualised in the inauguration event: the emancipation of *man* from *nature*.

Let me quote two passages related to the road which powerfully invoke this act of emancipation. The first is an excerpt from a chronicle published in "La Sociedad" -a newspaper from Bogotá-, which describes the magnitude of the Capuchin's enterprise as seen through the eyes of a "civilised" inhabitant from the country's highlands. The second is a fragment from Escandón's journal where he narrates the "colossal duel with nature" unleashed by the Apostolic Prefect in the San Francisco-Mocoa section.

> Imagine a spot in the most precipitous and abrupt part of our Andes, in a long canyon formed by two steep cordilleras, and in the background, meandering, the Mocoa River. Detonations echoing from cliff to cliff reach our ears, making the effect of powerful artillery batteries in the midst of a tough battle. One thousand and six hundred men, deployed in numerous guerrillas and filling an extension of ten kilometres, give the impression of a hardened army attempting to defeat the enemy on its way. *The illusion is complete*.
> …In reality, one thousand six hundred workers, divided in a multitude of crews, provided of enough tools, commanded by the reverend Capuchin fathers, attempt to break the wall, apparently insuperable, that hindered the access to the Amazon world. Massive and imposing rocks blow into pieces by the power of dynamite, which handled by skilled officers, ravages those crags that had defied the centuries.[64]

> [Montclar] undertook [the duel] with vigour, he fought, and he defeated: the upstanding jungle bowed to him, while the crags and mounts stroke his feet, and the waterfalls, rivers and abysses made way for him; all that nature seemed to greet him reverently, acknowledging him as their legitimate conqueror and victor in fair combat; and the undaunted son of San Francisco of Assisi entered Mocoa, holding in his right hand the crucifix and on his left the level and the compass.[65]

What we witness in this celebration of the violent conquest of nature by man, so overwhelmingly present in the visual and literary rhetoric of the inauguration rituals, is the reification of the classical myth through which an untamed nature is subdued so it can give way –to quote Hegel- to a "second nature" (the state) embodying the realm of reason.[66] This same myth, moreover, is continuously evoked in the various pictures of workers dynamiting and hammering granite rocks under the command of a few feverish monks determined to defeat the inhospitable nature of the cordillera. This is another kind of ritual, one that exalts the *creative destructive* power of the road (the "illusion" it creates, as the chronicler tells us) through the very act of breaking the immemorial "Andean barrier" separating the "savage" and "civilised" world.

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[64] *Las Misiones en Colombia*, 118-119 (emphasis added).
[65] *Informe sobre la terminación del Camino*, 16-17.
[66] Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976[1821]), 285. This myth is a prominent theme among social contract theoreticians such as Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau, to whom notions of peace, security or freedom –cornerstone elements of the modern state- inexorably stem from a neat distinction between the state of nature –ruled by instincts and passions- and the civil state– governed by reason. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*…; John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Hackett Pub Co., 1980[1690]); Charles Montesquieu, "The Spirit of the Laws", in *Montesquieu, Selected Political Writings*, ed. Melvin Richter, 106-242 (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1990); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (London: Penguin, 2004 [1762]).

Dynamiting the mountain, Vijagual creek (c.1911; Source: APCC)

The main effect of this creative destructive process is that, *through ritual*, all the violence it embodies, like the granite stones of the cordillera, is normalised or simply erased from the landscape. So powerful is the effect of ritual that, to quote Taussig's remark on the essence of state fetishism, "the signifier is itself prized apart from its signification so as to create a quite different architecture of the sign –an architecture in which the signified is erased".[67] And what do the signifier and signified stand for in this ritual? The former naturally alludes to the state, the "second nature" incarnated here in the Apostolic Prefect and his "artillery battery" of road workers. It is the *creative* part of the process, the *artifice* whereby the state comes to appear as an abstract force detached *from* and standing *above* society and nature. As for the latter, it represents the *destructive* part of the process or what needs to the destroyed and consumed in order to give way to the former: the "first nature" incarnated

[67] Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (London & New York: Routlege, 1992), 128.

in the savagery of the Indians and the ferocious topography of the cordillera and the *means* required to annihilate this nature: labour, dynamite, the crucifix.

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In the following chapters, I shall show how, at the level of *practice,* neither the state retains the immanent power and abstract character it is granted at the level of *myth*, nor are society and nature just passive agents shaped by domination or governmentality practices. Certainly, as it will be described, if the Putumayo road tells a story it is not exactly the story of man's unassailable victory over the untamed wilderness, nor of the state's relentless expansion over the "savage" frontier, and much less of the all-encompassing *Faustian* force of modernity. However, and by way of conclusion, I want to lay emphasis here on the significance of ritual within the context of the road, as it represents an essential element of the very process of state-building.

As noted, it is through ritual that the violence implied in the creative destructive process of the road is normalised or legitimised underneath its pervasive image of a civilising infrastructure. The most manifest form of violence during in the early history of the road relates to the hundreds of indigenous peoples forced to work on it. There exists an old legend among the Inga and Kamëntza indigenous peoples from the Sibundoy valley associated with this episode. First collected by Fray Jacinto de Quito, the legend, known as "La Leyenda de Nuestro Señor de Sibundoy" (The Legend of Our Lord of Sibundoy),[68] goes as follows:[69]

> A hunter had been living for a long time at a place known as "The Cedar" near the San Pedro river. One morning, he put poison on his arrows, and having put them in his quiver, took his bow and set off hunting in the direction of Sibundoy. He had been walking for some minutes, when he saw a huge bird, rather like a condor, flying very fast. He watched to see where it would land, and it alighted on a myrtle. Since the undergrowth around the tree was very thick, the hunter had to bend low, and force a way through with his hands, thus approaching his prey rather as a wolf would. But then he stood up in front of the myrtle...he remained motionless, paralysed by what he saw: at the foot of the tree, in a

[68] Quito, *Miscelánea*, 89-92.

[69] The version reproduced here corresponds to the abridged English translation of the original (included in Quito's Memoirs) published in Bonilla, *Servants,* 91-92. I have translated and added some fragments of the original which were omitted in Bonilla's book.

> hole shaped like a niche, Our Lord of Sibundoy was sitting barefoot, his hair long, clothed in "cusma" and "capisayo".[70]
> "I want you", said the Lord to the hunter, "to call the Indian Chapter so I can tell them what they have to do with me".
> The hunter, without uttering a word, ran to follow the order. Soon, not only the Indian Chapter but the whole town gathered at the place of the apparition.
> "I come to live among you –he said to them-, but on condition that you obey me and abandon your bad customs. And I want you to build a church in this place".
> The Governor, without answering to him, addressed his people and commanded them to start working on the Church. Some went to gather wood, others vines and palm leaf, etc. And soon the church was finished. Then, the same Governor appointed sacristans to take care of the Lord.

This part of the story, which according to Jacinto de Quito constitutes the basis of the old legend, would be expanded as follows due to the event of the road:

> The sacristan, noticing that the Lord's clothes were wet through every morning, suspected him of going out at night, and decided to find out. Under the pretext of renewing the candles, he went to the church at late night...
> The Lord had vanished. He told the Governor, who, in agreement with the other leading men, ordered that the culprit be beaten with twelve strokes of the whip. After this punishment had been carried out, the Indians expected that the Lord would ask for forgiveness and promise not to do it again; but instead he stood up, turned his back upon them and went off on the road to Pasto...They tried to catch him but he became invisible, and all they could do was go back to the village sadly, and repent of having beaten him. Their remorse became even more acute when they discovered that the reason why the Lord had gone out each night was to take their place working on the road from Pasto to Mocoa, which he did in the following way:
> When night approached, he grabbed a machete and a candle and went to work on the road and to build bridges over the rivers. He stopped only at daybreak, when he came back to the church and rested in his niche with his clothes wet.
> The Indians, when travelling through the new road, upon finding it blocked by palisades or slides, followed the wax tears left by the candles to avoid getting lost, and through this way they walked safe.

In Fray de Quito's narrative, this legend has the purpose of illustrating the "superstitious" character of the natives, and hence the "terrible struggle against the law of custom"[71] undertaken by the missionaries. The ethnologist Juan Friede has another hypothesis. According to him, this legend is about how the indigenous peoples from Sibundoy "transform in their minds those historic events and those social problems which they are

[70] The *cusma* and *capisayo* form part of the Sibundoy indigenous peoples' traditional costume. The former is a kind of sleeveless narrow robe made of cotton, while the latler is a long and wide *ruana* or poncho.
[71] Quito, *Miscelánea*, 32.

not able to face in practice".[72] I do not have the knowledge to analyse this legend in detail or its significance in the social and cultural context of the indigenous people from the Sibundoy valley. Yet, I think that it is revealing of how the Inga and Kamëntza struggle to make sense of the violence they were subjected to during construction of the road. This violence, we know, was inflicted on the Indians themselves but appears here projected on the image of the Lord of Sibundoy –that is, as noted by Friede, this constitutes a violence which cannot be faced directly. Furthermore, once projected, this violence seems to reflect back upon the Indians in the form of guilt (for having unjustly punished the Lord of Sibundoy, who was working in the road for their sake), with the effect that at the end this same violence (the one imposed on the Indians) is normalised or concealed.

This is precisely the same effect that we encounter in the road's rituals through their re-enactment of the state myth. To borrow Abrams's expression on state fetishism, through these rituals the state is revealed as "the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is".[73] The crucial aspect of such rituals, however, is not the way in which they conceal the state practices behind a mask (e.g. the creative destructive process through which the Indians were dispossessed of their labour and history) but how they reveal this same mask as constitutive of the state. Put another way, the significance of ritual lies here not in exposing the fiction of the state (its "civilising" mask) but in how it endows this fiction with an appearance of reality. This appearance or illusion of reality, seen as a practice rather than a mask of the state, is essential to grasp the violence involved in the history of the road and how it was rendered invisible or legitimised. And it is also essential to comprehend the different dynamics the road assisted and how through them -or even in spite of them- the state revealed its hegemonic character, which is the subject of the next chapter.

[72] Juan Friede, "Leyendas de Nuestro Señor de Sibundoy y el Santo Carlos Tamabioy", *Boletín de Arqueología*, Vol.1, No.4, (1945): 318.
[73] Philip Abrams, "Notes on the difficulty of studying the state", in Sharma and Gupta, *The Anthropology,* 125.

Chapter 3
The quest for hegemony

The completion of the road from Pasto to Mocoa holds a special significance in the history of the Putumayo. Historically, this event signalled the culmination of long-standing dreams, plans and efforts to overcome the geographical barrier separating this vast region from the rest of the country. Symbolically, it powerfully evoked and reified the image of the state as an all-embracing "civilising" power inexorably expanding over the "savage" frontier. The significance of this image, as has been argued, lies not in how real or fictitious it was but in how through the *illusion of reality* it projected, the rhetorical and physical violence it embodied remained concealed or was rendered legitimate. Some of the dynamics involved in the construction of the road, from the dispossession of indigenous labour to the dynamiting of the Andean cordillera, represent visible examples of this violence. Yet the history of the road went far beyond these episodes and did not end with its imposing inauguration event of March 1912. This is so not only because the road was originally aimed at reaching a navigable point in the Putumayo River (Mocoa was just halfway to that point), but because it was envisaged as an essential infrastructure to assist other state policies and plans. These included fostering the colonisation of the Putumayo's "vacant lands", stimulating the commercial activities across the region, providing access to the Atlantic Ocean via the Putumayo and Amazon rivers, reinforcing the military presence in the national borders, and aiding the expansion of the Capuchin Mission's "civilising work". Together, those plans and the ways in which they were conceived and translated into practice, epitomise the historical geography of state and frontier during the first decades of the twentieth century.

This chapter is about this historical geography, which I seek to explore and interrogate through the different practices, characters, conflicts and events involved in the history of the road, as well as some of the broader social and spatial dynamics this infrastructure assisted. Yet, this chapter is mostly concerned with hegemony, and specifically with the ways in which this concept allows us to have a better comprehension of the relation of *inclusive exclusion* between frontier and state. In doing so, I want to draw on Gramsci's notion of hegemony, especially as it helps to understand power in a relational way.[1]

It is important to begin by emphasising that "relational" does not necessarily mean "equivalence" or "symmetry". This is evident in Gramsci's analysis, where hegemony is primarily seen as a process by which certain "class" ideologies and values become dominant or end up prevailing in society. An important dimension of state hegemony, on the other hand, has to do with, or at least rests -as in Weber's notion of the state- upon the monopoly of coercion,[2] a situation which in practice more seldom than not stems from consent. The history of the road can, at least in part, be read from this purely coercive dimension, and more explicitly as a *creative destructive* process through which the "civilised" order of the state violently attempted to conquer and dominate the "savage" order of the frontier. As it has been previously emphasised, this process cannot be detached from the nineteenth century creole imaginary order of the nation, an order whose hegemonic condition was largely edified through and depended on the production and perpetuation of racial and spatial dichotomies. Those dichotomies, as well as the characters, representational forms and rituals through which they were constantly conjured and reproduced, are not only overwhelmingly present in the history of the road but are essential to grasp the relationship between hegemony and violence.

Yet this relationship, although representing an important dimension of state hegemony, does not mechanically translate into outright domination. This is to a large extent the case

[1] There are several excerpts of Gramsci's Prison Notebooks where the author emphasises this dialectical or relational character of hegemony. See Gramsci, *Notebooks*, 52, 56, 182. For a similar reading of hegemony see: William Roseberry, "Hegemony and the language of contention" in Joseph and Nugent, *Everyday forms,* 355-366; Bob Jessop, *State power. A strategic-relational approach* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 101-117.
[2] Weber, "Politics as vocation", 78.

of the road, a story that if seen from the distance between the ideals it symbolised in discourse and those attained in practice, speaks more about failure than success. This does not mean that the road and the different dynamics linked to it did not entail significant changes to the physical and human landscape of the Putumayo. Nor does it imply that the vision inspiring this frontier infrastructure project simply faded away when confronted with the harsh obstacles it faced on the ground. Rather, what this story unveils is precisely the recurrent and often vast gap between the state's power as *projected* at the level of myth and *realised* at the level of practice. This gap, on the other hand, leads us back to Gramsci's dialectical understanding of hegemony as expressed primarily in the struggle for consent in a situation of fragile or unstable equilibrium of forces, and thus to his conception of the state as "a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria…between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups –equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only to a certain point".[3]

My concern with hegemony is different to Gramsci's in the sense that I am not dealing here with class struggle under capitalism but the relationship between frontier and state. Still, the idea of hegemony (and its association with the process of state-formation) as involving struggle and situations of unstable equilibrium is central in addressing this relationship. The abundant archive records documenting the countless difficulties, struggles and conflicts present in the history of the road clearly reflects this situation of unstable equilibrium. Some of these issues include endless bureaucratic conflicts and obstacles frequently bringing the road works to a halt, everyday disputes with road workers and users, and harsh confrontations between the Capuchins and their political and personal adversaries. Another element which occupies a central place within this history is the dynamic role played by nature, an actor whose agency is often ignored in the state-making literature and yet constitutes a crucial aspect that sheds light on the unstable and contested character of state hegemony.[4]

[3] Gramsci, *Notebooks,* 182.

[4] Some ethnographical accounts of the state have examined in different ways the agency of nature or the landscape within the context of state-making. See, for instance, Penny Harvey, "The Materiality of State-

The main question which arises here is how, despite instability and conflict, we can still think of hegemony as a useful concept to approach state-making processes or, conversely, to talk of the state in terms of a hegemonic order. The answer to this question, as implied Gramsci's analysis, is precisely that it enables us to conceive domination as a process that is not external to but coexists with struggle and conflict.

This last point brings us back to the argument introduced in the previous chapters about the importance of conceiving the state as a force that is simultaneously ideological and material or, to quote Coronil, as a "form" that "works by establishing a relationship of equivalence between the general and the particular, the abstract and the concrete".[5] The road's documents examined in this chapter (official reports, letters, telegrams, pictures, "cadastral" plans and maps) speak of these different dimensions of state-making: they speak of the "civilising" ideology and logic driving the project of the road; of the many everyday dramas, power disputes, and ceaseless problems and obstacles "on the ground"; of the different and often contested ways in the road was conceived and appropriated; of the language or common grammar defining the terms and boundaries within which struggles and conflicts were expressed; and of the implicit and explicit silences and erasures present in this language. Again, the fundamental aspect of these documents and the different situations they describe is not what they tell us about one or another dimension of the state, but how they mirror the different ways in which such dimensions are mutually interdependent. And it is precisely this interdependency between the abstract and concrete or ideological and material, I suggest, that will allow us to appreciate the significance of the road within the hegemonic relationship of frontier and state.

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effects: An ethnography of a road in the Peruvian Andes", in Krohn-Hansen and Nustad, *State Formation,* 123-141; and Penny Harvey, "Landscape and commerce: creating contexts for the exercise of power", in *Contested Landscapes. Movement, exile and place*, eds. Barbara Bender and Margot Winer, 197-210 (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001); see also James Scott, *The art of not being governed. An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009).

[5] Coronil, *The Magical State,* 116.

Burdens and loads

For the native peoples of the Sibundoy valley and the Putumayo foothills, who for centuries had remained relatively isolated from the "civilised" side of the country, the defeat of the "Andes barrier" by the hands of the Catalan missionaries constituted a dramatic event. The burdens, humiliations and violent aggressions to which they were continuously subjected from the early days of the road, would soon make clear who would bear the brunt of this "civilisatory" scheme. One of the main paradoxes of this episode, as the legend of Our Lord of Sibundoy referred in the previous chapter suggests, is how the Indians, aided by the Lord, were to work on the missionaries' project as if it was meant to be their way to redemption.

It is difficult to establish the number of indigenous labourers on the road works or how much of this work was compulsory or unpaid. The Mission's reports regularly indicated the number of workers and wages paid, but they did not discriminate between indigenous and non-indigenous labour. The fact that as early as 1909, the missionaries were forbidden to resort to the system of tributary work, might help explain why if they intended to continue using this form of compulsory labour then there was no intention to report it. On the other hand, this prohibition was only partial. The resolution issued on this subject excepted work classified as "punishment" under the "Reglamento para el Gobierno de indígenas" (Indigenous' Government Code).[6] The Reglamento, a sort of constitution elaborated by Fidel de Montclar for the indigenous communities under the Mission's jurisdiction, contemplated various crimes such as thievery, drunkenness, public meetings and parties, and the penalties established included compulsory work from one to 20 days.[7] In any case, and regardless of the extent to which this code constituted a regular source of indigenous labour, there is plain evidence that at least during its early years the Indians were frequently compelled to work in the road at no pay.

As formerly noted, the Capuchins not only began to build the road with only the support of the Indians' tributary work, but had actually lobbied for the Sibundoy route, arguing the

[6] "Resolución No.264. Gobernación Departamento. Pasto, 17 Nov 1909", APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 4, n.f.
[7] "Reglamento para el Gobierno de Indígenas 1908" Art. 34, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 1, n.f.

abundance of free labour in the area. In September 1909, when the central government approved the $40,000 pesos budget requested by Montclar, hence allowing the Mission to hire paid labour, the pressure on the Indians did not decrease. Two months later, the indigenous authorities from the Sibundoy valley presented a memorandum to the Governor of Pasto complaining about this situation. They claimed that each of them was compelled to supply the Mission with a hundred or more workers per week, and protested about the harsh treatment they were given.[8] Although these claims were the basis of the aforementioned resolution, this legal measure would have limited application. This is illustrated not only by the fact that the missionaries could still force the Indians to work for free on the road as a form of punishment, but that indigenous claims on this regard did not cease.[9]

The scarcity of non-indigenous labour in the Putumayo by the time the Mission was commissioned to open the road also meant that for various years the Indians did the bulk of the waged work. In October 1910, for example, when the works were in full swing and the number of workers approached 1500, De Las Corts reported to the Minister of Public Works that 90% of them came from the indigenous town of Santiago.[10] Even though this proportion would gradually change as a wave of colonisers began to arrive and settle in the region, the Indians continued working on the road and often performed the most burdensome tasks. This was the case of the "cargueros" (porters), a strenuous chore carried out equally by men and women, and not infrequently children. In 1913, for instance, an inspector sent by the central government to oversee the works reported that seven out of the 34 workers currently employed in the Sibundoy Valley area were children aged between 10 and 13 years old. Upon questioning a foreman about this subject, the inspector pointed out that his answer was simply that children "worked better" than adults in the load of construction material.[11]

[8] APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 4, n.f.
[9] See, for example: AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.410-413v; Vol.1409, fol.375v; Vol.1413, fols.30-33.
[10] "Informe de los trabajos del camino del Oriente", 30 Oct 1910, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.323.
[11] "Informe que rinde el ingeniero comisionado por el Ministerio de Obras Públicas para verificar una inspección al camino al Putumayo", Oct. 1913, AGN, MOP, Vol.1409, fol.311.

Indigenous cargueros (n.d.; Source: APCC).

The cargueros were more commonly employed in the transport of supplies demanded by the missionaries and the road crews. A detailed invoice sent to De Las Corts in September 1912 by the road general supplier in Pasto provides us with some details about this trade.[12] The bill listed the names of porters dispatched from Pasto between August 7th and September 18th and included the load carried by and wages paid to each one. With the exception of two males –whose high loads assigned suggest that they had pack animals- the 71 porters listed bear indigenous surnames, mostly Inga and Kamentsá, and the proportion of men and women is almost equal. As the list does not provide ages it is not possible to establish the number of children-porters, although their presence is likely suggested in various cases where the person is registered as "[name] son of [name]". The loads oscillate between one and two and a half "arrobas" per person (25 and 62 pounds approx.), and the freights prices between $1 and $2 silver pesos, a variation possibly indicating the load destination, which could usually vary in time from two to seven days. The poor wages paid for this onerous job are hinted if we contrast them against the prices (at the Pasto

[12] Manuel Silva to Estanislao de Las Corts, 20 Sept. 1912, ADS, folder 11-010-01, Camino Pasto-Puerto Asís asuntos varios, n.f.

marketplace) of some of the basic goods listed in the same bill: $80 cents for a pound of bread and $60 for butter; $80 cents a knife; $3 pesos for a pair of trousers.

The burdens borne by the indigenous carriers were not confined to the long journeys, the low wages, and the excessive loads, which as referred previously also included carrying people. Abuses and mistreatments on the part of the road crews stationed along the way were not uncommon. In November 1912, for instance, Rogerio Becerra, Mayor of Mocoa, sent a letter to all the foremen drawing their attention to the recurrent cases of thievery and aggression against the carriers. "The workers labouring on the road and the telegraph", reads the missive, "cause great harm to the Indians, sometimes spoiling then, other treating them like beasts and stealing the rubber they carry to Pasto, thus making serious damage since the rubber owners have them [the Indians] arrested and charge them with the quantity stolen".[13] These aggressions continued to persist and the Indians sporadically responded to them, as suggested by events such as the shooting of a horse belonging to the road by the hands of the Sibundoy Indians reported in May 1914.[14] Yet, although highly symbolic of the daily burdens and violence born by the natives on the road, these events constituted just the prologue to more complex and lasting dynamics which this infrastructure promoted and assisted. Those dynamics, some of which are described below through the history of two towns, shed light on the significance of this infrastructure within the historical and spatial process of state-making in the Putumayo frontier.

A tale of two towns

As already noted, Fray Fidel de Montclar, head of the Mission and the main supporter of the road, always conceived this infrastructure project not as an end in itself but as the precursor to a "radical transformation" of the approximately 130,000 square kilometres he was entrusted with as Mission territory. This transformation, on the other hand, would stem from and was grounded in three central pillars which largely summarised the practices of statecraft in the Putumayo frontier during the first decades of the twentieth century:

[13] Rogerio Becerra to Sobrestantes y Caporales del Camino Nacional, 4 Nov. 1912, ADS, folder 09-01, Camino al Oriente, n.f.
[14] Vicente Narváez to Minister of Public Works, 15 May 1914, AGN, MOP, Vol.1409, fol.576v.

civilisation, material wealth, and sovereignty. The Mission's reports submitted annually to the central government provide abundant evidence of the progress achieved by the Catalan friars on those fronts. As these reports usually include long statistical annexes containing a wide range of information, from towns and schools founded to baptisms and weddings celebrated, it would be possible to follow those variables annually.[15] This task, however, is facilitated by the friars themselves. Eager to show the progress of the territory entrusted to the Mission and defend themselves from the frequent attacks by their political adversaries, the missionaries sporadically published leaflets and brochures containing "past vs. present" accounts of Putumayo.[16]

A good example of this missionary propaganda material is found in Fray Pacífico de Vilanova's extensive account of the first 25 years of the Mission in the Putumayo. According to the Capuchin friar, in 1906, a year after Fray de Montclar has been appointed Apostolic Prefect, the Putumayo Indians were in a "pitiful state, lacking connection with civilised elements, except for the places dominated by caucheros"; the mission territory only had the town of Mocoa and a "few hamlets", "two or three thatched chapels" and five schools. For the year 1930, he referred to the following numbers so as to let the readers to "judge for themselves" the transformation of the territory controlled by the Mission: about 19,700 "civilised" colonist settlers established in the Mission territory, 6,600 Indians in the process of being "reduced to civilised life", and around 6,300 "savages" still to be converted to the catholic faith; 39 towns established by the Capuchin Mission and another four under construction; 32 churches, 62 schools (half of them built by the Mission), two orphanages, a hospital and five dispensaries; and several trails, bridges and navigation routes connecting different points of the Apostolic Prefecture, all built by the Capuchins. As for the road, its prominence within the Capuchin's transformative quests is stressed in the friar's claim that "it has changed the region's face entirely".[17]

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[15] For a typical example of a Mission's statistical report see: *Las Misiones Católicas en Colombia. Informes años 1919, 1920, 1921* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1921): 134-143.
[16] See, amongst others: De Pinell and Del Mar, *Relaciones interesantes*; Leonidas Medina, *Conferencia sobre las Misiones del Caquetá y Putumayo. Dictada en la Basílica de Bogotá por el Ilmo. y Rvmo. Señor Obispo de Pasto, D.D. Leonidas Medina el día 12 de octubre de 1914* (Bogotá: Imprenta de San Bernardo, 1914).
[17] Vilanova, *Capuchinos Catalanes,* 273-277.

It is not the aim here to discuss at length the historical legacy of the Capuchin Mission in the Putumayo, and this constitutes a subject that has been widely addressed elsewhere.[18] However, and for the sake of the argument presented here, I will consider the history of two towns, Puerto Asís and Sucre, which are emblematic of the relation between the Mission's hegemonic rule and the practices of state-making in the Putumayo. Both histories, moreover, are not only inseparable from the history of the road but shed light on the gap between the discourses underpinning this infrastructure and its actual effects on the frontier.

Puerto Asís

The idea of Puerto Asís was born with the road. As early as 1906, Miguel Triana, the engineer sent to Putumayo by Reyes to study a route from Pasto to La Sofía, mentions that Estanislao de Las Corts already had the project in mind. The Capuchin friar, according to Triana, had strongly argued in favour of building the road through the Sibundoy valley and Mocoa, citing the abundance of free labour, and from there to a point on the Putumayo River; there, added De Las Corts, they planned to found the "City of Asís", a town conceived as the heart of a "great colonisable region" to be opened up by the road.[19]

Five years after Triana met the enthusiastic friar, the latter was directing the road works on the Pasto-Mocoa section and Fray de Montclar was lobbying in Bogotá in order to make the plan of Puerto Asís a reality. In July 1911, he presented a colonisation project to the National Congress. The project, a three-page typescript text, basically outlined the bases of what the Apostolic Prefect deemed to be the imperative steps the government should follow to avoid losing the "immense and lush jungles of the Caquetá and Putumayo" into the hands of Peruvians.[20] First of all, the roads from Guadalupe to Florencia (province of Caquetá) and

[18] The most widely known work on this subject is the one published in 1968 by the Colombian anthropologist Victor Daniel Bonilla, *Servants…* See also: Casas, *Evangelio y Colonización…*; Augusto Gómez, "El *Valle* de *Sibundoy:* el *despojo* de una *heredad*. Los *dispositivos ideológicos*, *disciplinarios* y *morales* de *dominación",* Anuario colombiano de historia social y de la cultura*,* No.32, (2005): 51-73; Gómez, *Putumayo*...
[19] Triana, *Por el sur,* 352.
[20] "Proyecto de Colonización del Caquetá y Putumayo", 15 Sept. 1911, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.417-421.

Pasto to Mocoa should be completed without delay, and then extended to navigable points in the Orteguaza (tributary of the Caquetá River) and Putumayo Rivers, respectively. Subsequently, five or ten square kilometres of land around each of those points were to be cleared, the town plan drawn, and the first "ranchos" (huts) built. Upon conclusion of this task, each settler family would be allotted a rancho and a 20-hectare land plot, in addition to tools and seeds, and provided with food for the first six months. The settler family should remain in the colony for at least two years in order to be granted property, or otherwise the house and land plot would be re-allotted to another colonist. As the project was designed for poor and landless peasants from other parts of the country, the government should not grant money to the settlers, as they would spend it and abandon the place afterwards. The total budget required for the project, initially conceived for 100 families, was estimated by Fray de Montclar as being $52,000 pesos. Finally, the friar contemplated a second stage with foreign migrants, and recommended a pilot project with 25 families, all of whom should be "moral and catholic individuals" so as to avoid "dangerous persons of depraved habits and anarchic ideas".

The congressmen, most of whom only knew the Putumayo through maps and feared the loss of this vast territory (the siege of La Pedrera had recently taken place), eagerly embraced the Apostolic Prefect's initiative. De Las Corts assumed the task of locating a suitable place for the Colony, and eventually chose a spot on the left margin of the Putumayo River, not far from Reyes' port La Sofía and about 90 kilometres south of Mocoa. There, through a mass officiated by the same friar in May 3rd of 1912, Puerto Asís officially came to life.[21]

In the Mission's annual report of that year, De Montclar devoted several pages to praise the privileged location of the Colony.[22] In the first place, he stressed its strategic military position by providing a chart of time distances to different points across the region in

[21] For a detailed account of the foundation and early history of Puerto Asís see: Guido Revelo, *Puerto Asís. Una aproximación a su historia entre los años 1912 y 1960* (Bucaramanga: Editorial SIC, 2006); "Puerto Asís y el pueblo Colombiano", 21 Nov. 1914, ADS, folder 9-II 10-03, n.f.; Plácido Fray, 1961, "Puerto Asís. Ayer y Hoy", APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Miscellany, n.f.; Vilanova, *Capuchinos Catalanes*, Vol.1, 276-287.
[22] *Las Misiones en Colombia,* 132-134.

dispute with Peru, and gave an assurance that from there Colombia could secure its rights against both Peru and Ecuador. Secondly, and resuscitating Reyes' inter-oceanic project, he emphasised its commercial advantages thanks to its fluvial access to Europe and the United States via the Putumayo and Amazon rivers. Last but not least, the friar considered the significant benefit the new foundation represented for the Mission. "I cannot leave aside" –he noted- "the advantages that Puerto Asís offers to the missionaries for the evangelisation of the innumerable tribes that wander in those endless forests; it will be the point of departure from where they will leave to announce the faith to the wretched sons of the jungle".[23] De Montclar's arguments, all imbued with a spatial content, are revealing of the friar's clear geopolitical vision of the state.

De Las Corts, now head of the Colony, began the first works by mid 1912 with the help of the first settlers and some indigenous families from the surrounding area. A few hectares of forest were cleared and a big two-story house designed to house 100 colonists and a provisional church were built. Soon, however, they were faced with the problem of provision shortages. The most basic supplies such as food, tools, and clothing had to be brought on the backs of Indian carriers from the city of Pasto more than 200 kilometres away, implying several days of travel. Even considering the meagre wages paid to the Indians, Fray de Las Corts complained that the transport costs were "much higher" than the value of the goods themselves.[24] In order to ease the problem of food supply, the Colony's most pressing issue, the energetic friar rushed to start the plantation works. However, facing a scarcity of settlers, he wrote in May 7th to De Montclar that he had "forced" the [indigenous] villages of Guamués, San Diego and Ocano to plant five "cuadras"[25] each".[26] In the 1912 Mission's report, De Montclar would subtly change this version declaring instead that Indians had been "invited" by the missionaries, and that even those living three days from Puerto Asís had come to help with their families for several days.[27]

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[23] *Las Misiones en Colombia,* 134.
[24] *Misiones Católicas del Putumayo: documentos relativos a esta Comisaría* (Bogotá: Imprenta de San Bernardo, 1914), 45.
[25] The *cuadra* or *fanegada* is a unit of land measure equaling 6,400 sq metres.
[26] Estanislao de Las Corts to Apostolic Prefect, 7 May 1912, quoted in Vilanova, *Capuchinos Catalanes*, Vol.1, 282 (emphasis added).
[27] *Las Misiones en Colombia,* 135-136.

The early lack of settlers was largely related to the fears among colonists about Puerto Asís' climate, a situation the Apostolic Prefect attributed to a campaign on the part the "Mission's enemies".[28] To overcome this impasse, and anxious to show results to the government, as early as April 1912 the Apostolic Prefect had commanded Fray Andrés de Cardona, in charge at that time of the road works from Mocoa to Puerto Asís, to recruit 200 labourers and send them to the Colony at once. In order to persuade them, De Montclar asked him to make them with all sorts of promises including higher wages than those paid on the road; those reticent to go, conversely, were to be threatened by assuring them they would not be hired anymore by the Mission. "At any rate" –he urged De Cardona- "it is good to have quite a few people going to Puerto Asís because in Bogotá they are persuaded that the Colony is well advanced, and it would be a tremendous discredit if after so much talk and fanfare we end up having nothing".[29]

The Apostolic Prefect visited Puerto Asís in July and, perhaps trying to downplay the various problems currently afflicting the Colony, showed himself to be highly optimistic about the progress achieved so far. He reported that there were 20,000 plantain shrubs, 30 hectares of sugar cane and great quantities of corn, manioc, and rice planted. He found three new houses and, excited by the arrival of new settlers, ordered the construction of another 30. As for the authority of the missionaries among the villagers, he observed that: "the missionary is for them all what in a well-organised society the civil, ecclesiastic, military, and political authority can be; in other words, there was no other authority than the Priest".[30]

In practice and "unofficially", however, things didn't look that bright. The arrival in early September of 1912 of a military contingent of 500 men, together with the harsh winter that hit the Putumayo that year, left the provision of supplies in a critical state. Desperate, De Las Corts sent a letter to De Montclar grumbling about the situation:

> What can I do in the Colony with so many people, without dishes, cups, spoons, etc. etc.?

[28] *Las Misiones en Colombia,* 134.
[29] Fidel de Montclar to Andrés de Cardona, 19 April 1912, ADS, folder 11-010-01, Camino Pasto-Puerto Asís asuntos varios, n.f.
[30] *Las Misiones en Colombia*, 137.

> I'm tired of asking and nothing arrives. I ran out of bread and flour 5 weeks ago.
> I can make it with plantain or nothing. But the rest?...Something to season; nor even once had I got onion, garlic, species, etc.
> Ever since the Colony exists people only eat with water, salt and fat. For my part I don't complain, although I wish, but the rest?
> I don't have anything except corn, and the manioc and plantain will still take two months.[31]

If the 1912 long and mean winter meant that the Capuchin road became virtually impassable in several parts, hence making the transport of provisions a true feat, the dry season that followed did not necessarily alleviate the situation of the Colony. For instance, in February 1913 the Commander of the military division stationed in the Puerto Asís, General Lucio Velasco, wrote to the President and the Minister of War notifying them of the worrying state of affairs there. The General reported that the low level of the Guineo river (tributary of the Putumayo) in Puerto Umbría had not allowed for several days the transport of goods from there to Puerto Asís, about 50 kilometres to the south, and noted that construction of the road between these two points had not yet initiated. In consequence, he complained that the soldiers had been "very malnourished" and that if summer extended, and he had heard this was highly likely, "the disaster will be eminent".[32]

Despite General Velasco's dire omen, Puerto Asís survived its chaotic first year. In November 1913, the central government issued a law (Law 52 of 1913) which decreed the creation of a "Junta de Inmigración" (Immigration board) in charge of promoting and supporting the colonisation in the Caquetá and Putumayo, and for that purpose established an initial annual budget of $20,000. The Junta, chaired by the Governor of Nariño and the Apostolic Prefect, was assigned a wide array of tasks, ranging from the identification and allocation of "baldíos"[33] to the establishment and overseeing of the 'moral standards' to be fulfilled by current and potential colonisers.[34] This last subject would be particularly observed, as evidenced by the strict "Conditions of Morality" established by de Las Corts in

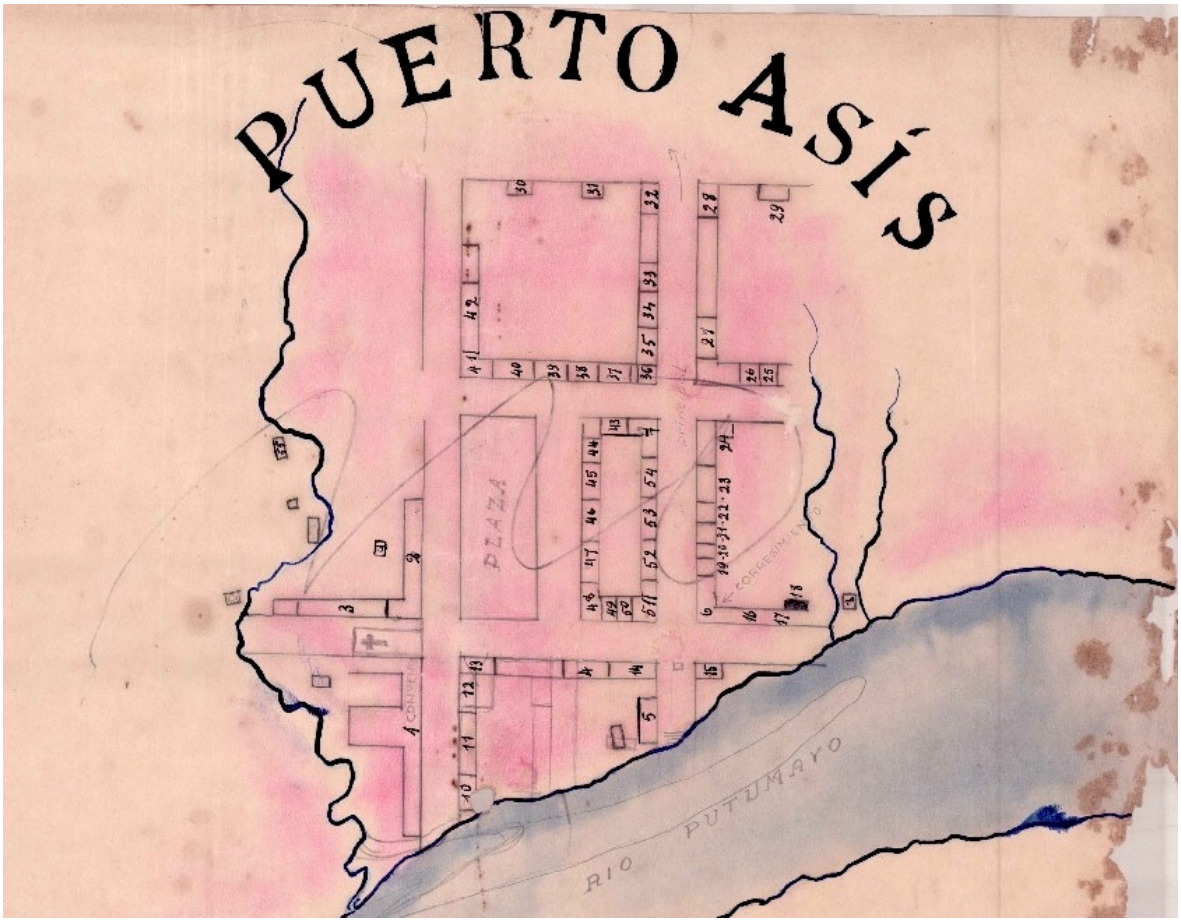
[31] Fray de Las Corts Fray de Montclar, 16 Sept. 1912, ADS, folder 09-01, Camino al Oriente, n.f.
[32] Velasco to Minister of War, AGN, MRE, Diplomática y Consular, Box 742, folder 323, fols.36-36v.
[33] In legal terms, *baldíos* are lands owned by the state with the purpose of awarding them to individuals who comply with certain requirements established by the law.
[34] "Ley 52 de 1913 (5 noviembre). Por la cual se provee a la colonización del Caquetá y Putumayo", APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 1, n.f.

the Puerto Asís settler's guidelines,[35] or the policy set by the Junta which contemplated that in order to be eligible colonisers should provide a "certificate of morality" issued by their town's priest or mayor.[36]

With the government's financial aid, the administrative support provided by the *Junta,*[37] and above all the obstinacy of the Catalan friars, Puerto Asís began to show its fruits. The Mission's annual reports shed some light on the Colony's progress in the subsequent years. The 1914 report, for example, notes that there were currently 210 individuals living in the Colony, without counting the army soldiers, and that commissioners had been sent to Nariño to recruit another 500; as for the "material progress", it mentions two sugar mills and a sawmill imported from the United States, abundant plantain crops –exceeding 50,000 plants- and a significant increase of pasturelands thanks to grass seeds brought from Europe.[38] The 1916 report lists a hospital, 80 cattle property of the Mission, a big supplies shop for the settlers, and four crews, totalling 90 men, employed on the Mission's enterprises, including several plantations (coffee, cotton, sugar cane, rice, etc.), construction works and cattle breeding.[39] By 1917, the number of "white" settlers had reached 346 and there were 46 houses built, 250 cattle, owned both by the settlers and the Mission, and 720 hectares cultivated.[40] Fray Gaspar de Pinell, currently in charge of the Colony, enthusiastically wrote in June of that year that "people no longer fit in the houses, and every day I find myself in trouble accommodating the newcomers. Two big steers are consumed each week".[41] The plan's section of Puerto Asís shown below gives a sense of the Colony's progress around that time, as indicated by the current town's buildings and

[35] "Garantías y condiciones para los que desean establecerse en la Colonia de Puerto Asís", 8 July 1913, ADS, Colonia Puerto Asís, n.f.
[36] "Prospecto para la colonización del Putumayo", 20 April 1914, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo Box.3, n.f.
[37] Although the *Junta* had been assigned executive functions, the regular newsletters issued by this board suggest that its role ended up being rather limited and largely restricted to spread and publicise the colonisation projects region wide. See, for example: "Boletín de La Junta de Inmigración Nos.1-2", 20 July 1914, Pasto, Imprenta del Departamento, in APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 1, n.f.
[38] *Misiones Católicas del Putumayo,* 45-52.
[39] *Informe sobre las Misiones del Putumayo* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1916), 42-44.
[40] *Informes sobre las misiones del Caquetá, Putumayo, Guajira, Casanare, Meta, Vichada, Vaupés y Arauca*, (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1917), 97-98, 118.
[41] *Informes sobre las misiones del Caquetá, Putumayo…1917,* 77.

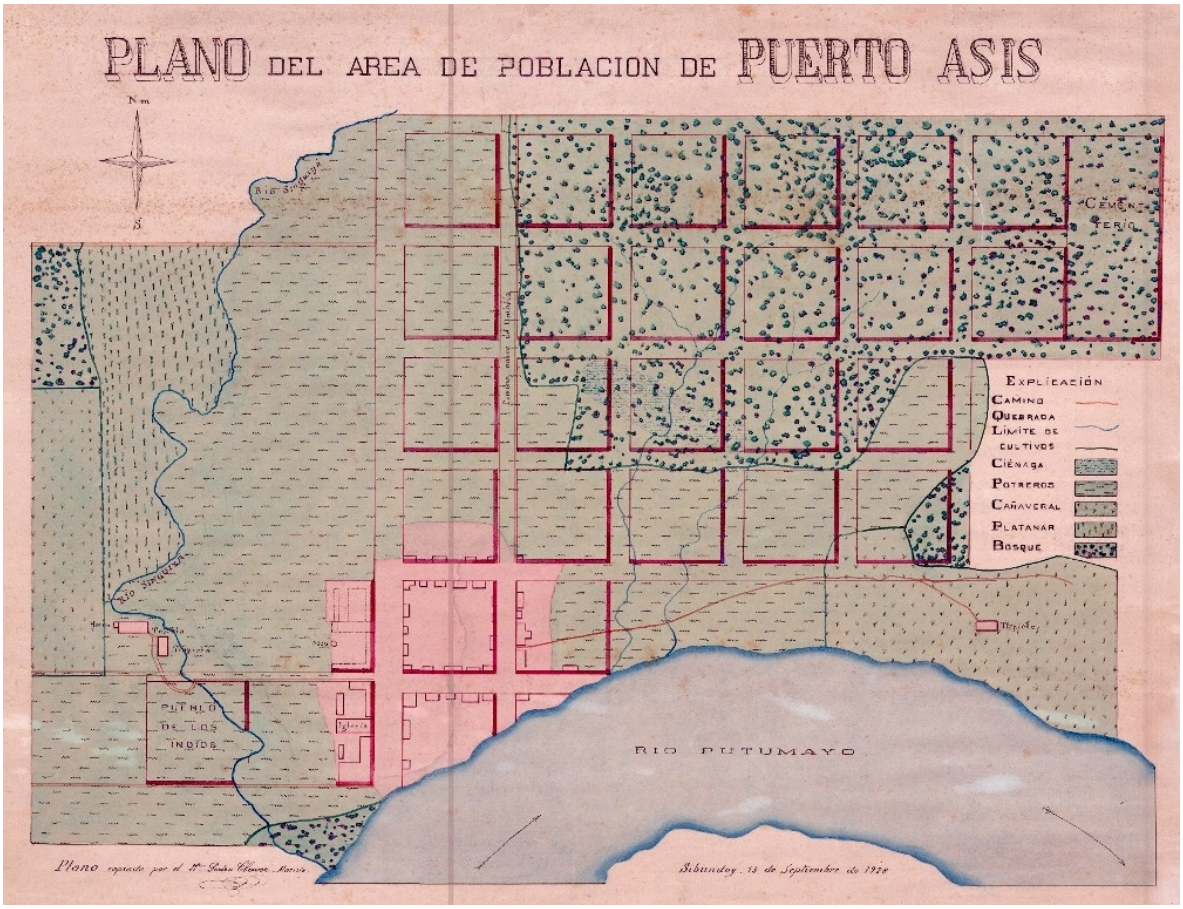
houses, which include chapel, convent and orphanage (nos.1 and 2), girls' school (no.3), army headquarters (no.4), transport agency (no.5), custom's house (no.6), liquor agency and mail office (no.7), slaughterhouse (no.8) and settler's houses (no.10 onwards).



Section of plan of Puerto Asís, c. 1917 (Source: ADS)

Two years later, however, this enthusiasm seems to have melted away and the future of Puerto Asís looked bleak: the military contingent, which according the friars "brought life and movement to the Colony", had been withdrawn; the government's financial aid had been reduced to half, and the friars complained that the budget was insufficient "even to subsist", a situation which resulted in some families having left the place. "In consequence" –cried the friars- "that Colony, whose life is so crucial to support, has greatly diminished".[42]

[42] *Labor de los Misioneros en el Caquetá y Putumayo, Magdalena y Arauca. Informes años 1918-1919* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1919), 33-34.



Plan of Puerto Asís (1928) showing pasture land, crop and forest areas. The Indigenous zone ("Pueblo de los Indios") is displayed at the bottom left corner of the map (Source: ADS).

The missionaries did everything possible to overcome the most pressing problems of the Colony. In order to deal with the issue of acclimatisation, they brought a group of "colonos morenos" (black settlers) from the province of Chocó, purportedly with very good results.[43] The task of "reducing" the indigenous tribes from neighbouring areas –mainly Kofán and Siona- proved more challenging. Nevertheless, the Mission partially solved this difficulty with the establishment of an orphanage managed by Franciscan nuns (picture below), which by 1916 already had 100 indigenous children. The way to recruit pupils described in that year's report, and which basically consisted of compelling their parents to leave them under the nuns' care, reveals that the term "orphanage" was in practice a euphemism for the often harsh "civilising" methods deployed by the Capuchins.[44] The move in this case turned out to be doubly effective, since by retaining the children the missionaries not only

[43] *Informes sobre las misiones del Caquetá, Putumayo…1917,* 77-78.
[44] *Informes sobre las misiones del Caquetá, Putumayo…1917,* 86-87.

facilitated the evangelisation work amongst them, but also kept their families close. In addition to this, the Apostolic Prefect would years later issue a stern regulation for the same indigenous communities, which required them, amongst others, to establish their houses and crops in a designated place (shown in the map above) nearby the Colony, where they could be "under the surveillance of the missionaries".[45]

Puerto Asís orphanage, 1931 (Source: ADS, GT).

Despite the victories won against the hostile climate and the Putumayo natives, there was an obstacle the adept monks could never totally overcome. Having inspired the idea of Puerto Asís, the road from Pasto was expected to reach the Colony in the same year of its foundation. Nevertheless, it took more than two decades to be completed, and eventually became a major headache, keeping this frontier settlement stagnant for many years. Indeed, if the Colony endured hard times at the outset due to the difficulty of getting provisions, this problem would be much aggravated when it came to trade its products. To

[45] n.t., 20 Jan 1927, APCC, Box.3, n.f.

deal with this problem, the Capuchins went as far as attempting to establish trade with the Brazilian city of Manaus, about 3,000 kilometres by river. In 1918, they persuaded the government of the importance of the project in both commercial and sovereignty terms, and eventually travelled to that city and chartered a 45-ton boat. The experiment was early frustrated when the boat, packed with Brazilian goods and carrying Fray de Pinell on board, was arrested by Peruvian authorities, allegedly for not having directed the ship to Iquitos first, on his way to Puerto Asís and sent back to Manaus.[46]

This fiasco did not deter the friars whom, obsessed with the idea, soon embarked on an even more ambitious project. Again with the government's support, in 1919 they imported a cargo ship from England to the Pacific port of Tumaco. From there, it was transported piece by piece on mules for nearly 500 kilometres across the Andes and the Putumayo lowlands, and finally assembled in Puerto Asís. Then, and to the friars' dismay, they found that the boat's engine was too feeble to navigate the Putumayo River upstream.[47] This epic failure would end up burying the inter-continental navigation projects for many decades.

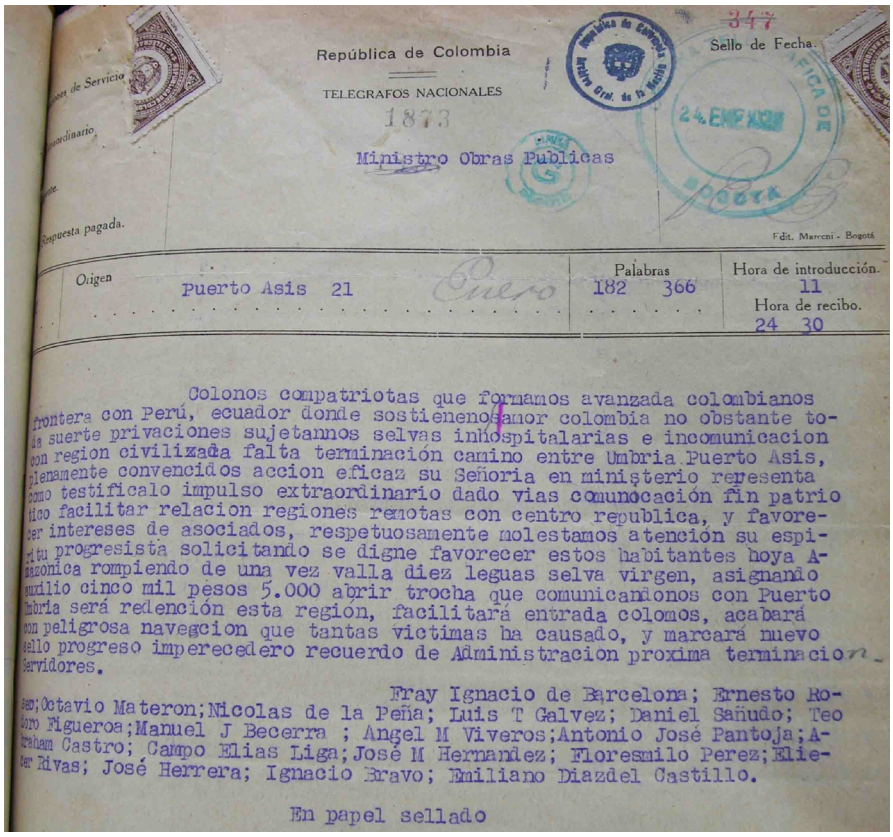
Puerto Asís, panoramic view, 1928 (Source: ADS, GT).

As long as the government's concern regarding the foreign threat on Putumayo lasted, the Apostolic Prefect's pleas remained effective, hence giving life, although artificial, to the Colony. Yet, when the awareness began to fade and the support to withdraw, the vulnerable

[46] For a detailed account of this episode see: *Labor de los Misioneros en el Caquetá y Putumayo*, 40-48.
[47] *Las Misiones Católicas en Colombia,* 94-98; Vilanova, *Capuchinos Catalanes*, Vol.2, 96-97.

nature of the Mission's colonisation project was fully exposed. Several Mission reports, printed articles, letters and telegrams sent to Bogotá recount the settlement's appalling situation.[48] Another significant event would have to occur, the armed conflict with Peru in 1932, for Puerto Asís to momentarily awake from its languid existence. Meanwhile, it managed to survive, though in a critical state. The cry of its inhabitants in a telegram –one of many (see image below)- sent to Bogotá in 1926 cannot be more telling:

> We colono compatriots form Colombians' outpost frontier with Peru, Ecuador, where love for Colombia sustains us despite all sorts privations, subjected by inhospitable forests and isolation from civilised region, conclusion road between Umbría and Puerto Asís needed...respectfully ask attention of your progressive spirit requesting deign to favour inhabitants Amazon basin breaking once and for all ten leagues wall virgin forest...trail to Puerto Umbría will be region's redemption, will facilitate entrance colonos, will end dangerous navigation causing too many victims, and will mark imperishable progress seal...[49]



República de Colombia

TELEGRAFOS NACIONALES

1873

Ministro Obras Publicas

Sello de Fecha

Respuesta pagada.

Edit. Marconi - Bogotá

Origen	Palabras	Hora de introducción.
Puerto Asis 21 Enero	182 366	11
		Hora de recibo. 24 30

Colonos compatriotas que formamos avanzada colombianos frontera con Perú, ecuador donde sostenemos amor colombia no obstante to- de suerte privaciones sujetannos selvas inhospitalarias e incomunicacion con region civilizada falta terminación camino entre Umbria Puerto Asis, plenamente convencidos accion eficaz su Señoria en ministerio representa como testificalo impulso extraordinario dado vias comunocación fin patrio tico facilitar relacion regiones remotas con centro republica, y favore- cer intereses de asociados, respetuosamente molestamos atención su espi- ritu progresista solicitando se digne favorecer estos habitantes hoya A- mazonica rompiendo de una vez valla diez leguas selva virgen, asignando auxilio cinco mil pesos 5.000 abrir trocha que comunicandonos con Puerto Umbria será redención esta región, facilitara entrada colonos, acabará con peligrosa navegcion que tantas victimas ha causado, y marcará nuevo sello progreso imperecedero recuerdo de Administracion proxima terminacio- Servidores.

Fray Ignacio de Barcelona; Ernesto Ro- ; Octavio Materon; Nicolas de la Peña; Luis T Galvez; Daniel Sañudo; Teo doro Figueroa; Manuel J Becerra ; Angel M Viveros; Antonio José Pantoja; A- braham Castro; Campo Elias Liga; José M Hernandez; Floresmilo Perez; Elie- cer Rivas; José Herrera; Ignacio Bravo; Emiliano Diazdel Castillo.

En papel sellado

Telegram from colonists of Puerto Asís to Minister of Public Works (Source: AGN, MOP, Vol.1414, fol.351)

[48] Fray de Montclar to Minister of Public Works, AGN, MOP, Vol. 1414, fols. 415-421; Fidel Montclar (under the pseudonym Delfín Iza), "Amazonia Colombiana. El peligro existe" and "Asuntos del Caquetá y Putumayo. ¿Es ignorancia de la geografía o abandono de nuestros intereses?", *Asuntos de actualidad relativos al Putumayo* (Bogotá, Casa Editorial Marconi, 1924) 2-4, 13-15.

[49] Colonos Puerto Asís to Minister of Public Works, 21 Jan 1926, AGN, MOP, Vol.1414, fol.351.

"Antonio Díaz carries on his back the jaguar or 'tigre mariposa' hunted by him", 1930 (Source: APCC).

"Privations", "isolation", "redemption", "inhospitable forests", "civilised" and "progress", are some of the words contained in the telegram quoted above and which form part of the dominant vocabulary invoked in the missionaries and settlers in the countless claims, grievances and appeals to the central government. This vocabulary is also evoked by many of the Mission's pictures such as the close up portrait of a settler from Puerto Asís exhibiting a large jaguar, a full-scale copy of which is kept in the Capuchin Missionary museum in Barcelona. This visual and literal vocabulary talks simultaneously about the expectations, conflicts, and disillusions stemming from a particular *hegemonic* narrative conveying the relationship between state and frontier.

The hegemonic nature of this narrative is revealed precisely in how it exhibits a language or common grammar through which power is enacted and expressed. In other words, as noted

by Roseberry, hegemony is revealed here in how "the words, images, symbols, forms, organisations, institutions, and movements used by subordinate groups to talk about, understand, confront, accommodate themselves to, or resist their domination are shaped by the process of domination itself".[50] In the specific history of Puerto Asís, this constitutes a language which powerfully reifies the dichotomous oppositions between frontier and state, "civilisation" vs. "savagery", "centre" vs. "periphery", "progress" vs. "backwardness", and the relation of *inclusive exclusion* which such oppositions sustain.

The following section tells the story of Sucre, another Mission settlement located in the Sibundoy valley. This story is in many ways different to Puerto Asís, starting from the contrasting roles the road played in both cases. However, in another sense, this is a story that, like Puerto Asís, cannot be isolated from this language, whose different manifestations (literal, visual, cartographic) are crucial to understand and further explore this relation of *inclusive exclusion.*

Sucre

If the absence of the road was a lasting curse for the colonist settlers of Puerto Asís, its arrival at the Sibundoy valley would entail dramatic changes for its native inhabitants and the valley's physical landscape. The origins of this story, however, cannot be solely attributed to the road, and are largely related to a violent land conflict that for several decades confronted the Capuchin Mission, the Indians, and the colonists.

Around the end of nineteenth century, when the first "whites", mainly mestizo peasants from Nariño, began to occupy lands of the Valley which the natives claimed their own, fierce disputes began to arise between them. The Capuchins, judging that conflicts could be avoided by segregating the spaces inhabited by both groups, and at the same time convinced that the presence of the new settlers in the valley would have a great "civilising effect" on the Indians, early came with a "Solomonic" solution: they persuaded the Sibundoy Indians to cede a land parcel in the eastern corner of the valley, and founded there

[50] Roseberry, "Hegemony", 361.

the town of San Francisco in 1902, a settlement strictly conceived for "white colonisers".[51] One of the first descriptions of San Francisco comes from Miguel Triana, who in his 1906 expedition journal noted that the town was a tiny white colony made of 30 to 40 small houses, and constituted "the social symbol of the civilised race".[52] Impressed by the beauty and fertility of the Valley, the engineer observed that its only inconvenience were the Sibundoy Indians, who represented an "insurmountable obstacle for civilisation and farming".[53]

Despite Triana's judgement, the fact is that at the time he visited the Valley, its population was predominantly indigenous, 2,700 against 270 whites according to the 1904 Intendancy census which he published in his journal,[54] and the lands legally belonged to the former under the figure of "resguardo" (indigenous communal territories). This situation would begin to change with the coming of the road. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the road was not only conceived as a vital infrastructure for the missionaries' civilising plans. Nariño's elites, attracted by the valley's lands and eager to take advantage of the many opportunities the road would bring, actively supported the project. These expectations, on the other hand, are not difficult to appreciate. The Sibundoy valley, 50 kilometres east from Pasto, forms a plateau of approximately 8,500 hectares at an average altitude of 2,000 metres, whose rich soils, abundantly irrigated by rivers rising in the surrounding mountains and flowing through the valley, offer ideal conditions for agricultural and livestock production.[55] Yet, by the time the road was being opened, the valley's lands were far from resembling the vacant and uncultured landscape portrayed by Triana or the Catalan missionaries themselves. For instance, the Inspector commissioned in 1912 by the government to evaluate the recently inaugurated road, observed in his report that the

[51] For a detailed account of the early land disputes between Indians and settlers and the foundation of San Francisco see: Gómez, *Putumayo*, 190-195; Vilanova, *Capuchinos Catalanes*, Vol.1, 86-101.
[52] Triana, *Por el sur,* 359.
[53] Triana, *Por el sur,* 361.
[54] Triana, *Por el sur,* 292.
[55] This extension corresponds to the flat area of the Sibundoy Valley, whose total area –including the surrounding mountain zone- has been estimated at 52,000 hectares. However, during most of the twentieth century a considerable part of the flat zone -or the valley properly speaking- was marshland, and other part flooded during the winter season.

valley was "heavily populated" and "fairly cultivated" by the indigenous communities.[56] Still, in another missive he also noted that although the Indians claimed ownership of the valley and resented the presence of "white" settlers, there was "great enthusiasm" on the part of the latter to obtain land grants there.[57]

The Inspector's remarks largely anticipated the drastic agrarian reform that was about to take place in the valley. The parts involved in this long and conflictive process, however, were not restricted to the Capuchins, the valley's natives, and a few greedy land-grabbers from Nariño. As some authors have noted, the early twentieth century colonisation of the valley and the Putumayo foothills is largely associated with the prevalent land tenure system in Nariño, characterised by the excessive predominance of "minifundios" (small holdings).[58] The scarcity of land translated into the successive division of property into tiny and uneconomic plots, hence led to an untenable situation marked by conflict and increasing poverty. This situation differed slightly from the general pattern in the neighbouring provinces of Huila and Cauca, and broadly speaking the Andean region, characterised by the expansion of "latifundio" (latifundium) at the expense of indigenous and peasant lands.[59] The effect in both cases, nevertheless, would be the same and constitutes one of the most distinctive features of the country's twentieth century agrarian history: thousands of landless people either forced to work in large "haciendas" under different, often coercive, labour systems, or fleeing to the remote "frontiers" attracted by, often illusory, promises of empty and rich lands.

The history of Sucre can only be understood within this broader geographical and historical context. This history, on the other hand, began to materialise with the arrival of the road and more specifically with the sanctioning of a law (Law 51 of 1911) months before its

[56] Rufino Gutiérrez to Ministry of Public Works, 24 June 1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.579-582.
[57] Rufino Gutiérrez to Ministry of Public Works, 21 April 1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.561-562v.
[58] See: Brücher, *La colonización…Ariari,* 40-41; Chaves, "La Colonización", 584-586; Wesche, *El Desarrollo,* 91-105.
[59] For a general history of this process see the excellent work by Catherine Legrand, *Frontier expansion and peasant protest in Colombia, 1850-1936* (Albuquerque: University of México Press, 1986). For the specific context of the Amazon and Putumayo regions see, amongst others: Fajardo, "Fronteras, colonizaciones"…; Domínguez, "National expansion," 405-418.

inauguration. The Law's chief objective, as stated in its first article, was to facilitate the colonisation along the road, and for this purpose decreed the founding of a town in the middle of the Sibundoy valley, to be named Sucre.[60] Although it did not explicitly neglect the Indians' rights over the valley, the law stipulated that they had to prove those rights, whose defence would be assumed by a lawyer appointed by the government and paid by the province of Nariño. If their claims were rejected in court, the Indians would lose their current possession of communal lands, and instead be allotted two hectares of land per head in a designated place different from the one chosen for Sucre. As for the rest of the valley lands, they would be redistributed between the Mission, the future town and the province of Nariño, and the latter would be entitled to sell a portion, in plots from 50 to 100 hectares, by public auction. Law 51 was amended by further laws (106 of 1913 and 69 of 1914)[61] which apart from defining the location, extension and other aspects related to Sucre, created a "Junta de baldíos" (vacant lands board) in charge of putting the new regulations into practice and chaired by the Governor of Nariño, the Apostolic Prefect, and five members of the Pasto City Council.

The indigenous claims, as the conflicts that began to unfold in the valley would soon prove, proved to be fruitless. The story of how this happened is, however, less clear. There is evidence, provided by Friede, which confirms that at the time the Law 51 was being passed, the Indians had in their possession title-deeds, which they had referred to in a telegram to the President, proving their ownership of a considerable part of the valley's lands.[62] The document, known as the "Testamento de Carlos Tamabioy", basically consisted of a will, dated from 1700, in which the Indian chief Don Carlos Tamabioy left his sons and his clan a land he had purchased from the king of Spain.[63] Bonilla, the most severe critic of the Mission, argues that the Law was flawed since the payment of the lawyer assigned to

[60] "Ley 51 de 1911. Por la cual se ceden unos terrenos baldíos al Departamento de Nariño y se manda a fundar una población", 18 Nov.1911, APCC, Box 1, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 1, n.f.
[61] "Ley 106 de 1913. Que adiciona y reforma la 51 de 1911 y ratifica una cesión de terrenos baldíos", 29 Nov. 1913; "Ley 69 de 1914. Por la cual se reforman las leyes 51 de 1911 y la 106 de 1913", 12 Nov. 1914, APCC, Box 1, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 1, n.f.
[62] Friede, "Leyendas", 317.
[63] A map of the Tamabioy's lands and a transcription of the referred will can be found in Victor Bonilla, *Siervos de Dios Y Amos de los Hombres* (Cali: Cargraphics, 2006), 70, 385-388.

defend the Indians was to be assumed by the province of Nariño, one of the parties involved in the process. Most gravely, he suggests, based on another person's testimony, that the missionaries intentionally disappeared or seized and hid the alluded testament.[64] Whether Bonilla's allegation is true or not, the fact remains that the Apostolic Prefect was decided to carry forward the reform by all means. Certainly, the obstinate friar not only actively lobbied for the laws in question, but in an fervent pamphlet he wrote supporting the founding of Sucre he stated: "the foundation of Sucre is imperative; and it will happen; because it must happen; it is needed by the poor of Nariño, it is needed by the Indians of Sibundoy valley, it is needed by Pasto and above all it is needed by the Nation".[65]

Once the laws were sanctioned, the missionaries rushed to put them into practice. The Indians, taking the worst part within the new territorial order, angrily protested through letters and telegrams sent to Bogotá. One of these missives, a memorandum signed by the Indians of Santiago -where Sucre was to be built- to the President in July 1914, shows their despair and indignation against the current state of affairs. "Tired of bearing a black existence in every sense on account of the Capuchin Mission", reads the beginning of the two-page letter, "who has deprived us of our right of property over lands that with much sweating and effort we opened overthrowing mounts and ploughed, we are today ceaselessly stripped of the best part of those lands we have occupied since immemorial times and existence of our ancestors, by the alluded Mission, which doesn't respect any kind of authority and less the laws...".[66] What follows is a denunciation of the burdens and punishments imposed by the friars, including the use of stocks, and a desperate plea to the President to take matters into his hands, for, they declared "there has not been authority [in the Valley] to execute the mandates of the Supreme Government"; to which they added, contesting and yet at the same time reinforcing the missionaries' rhetoric, "it's been more

[64] Bonilla, *Servants,* 108-109. Curiously, this detail was omitted by the author in the 2006 Spanish reprint of the book. See: Bonilla, *Siervos,* 171-176.
[65] *Informes sobre las misiones del Caquetá, Putumayo,…* 28.
[66] The Indians referred here specifically to the Law 89 of 1890, which contemplated a series of measures to safeguard the indigenous property rights over the *resguardos*.

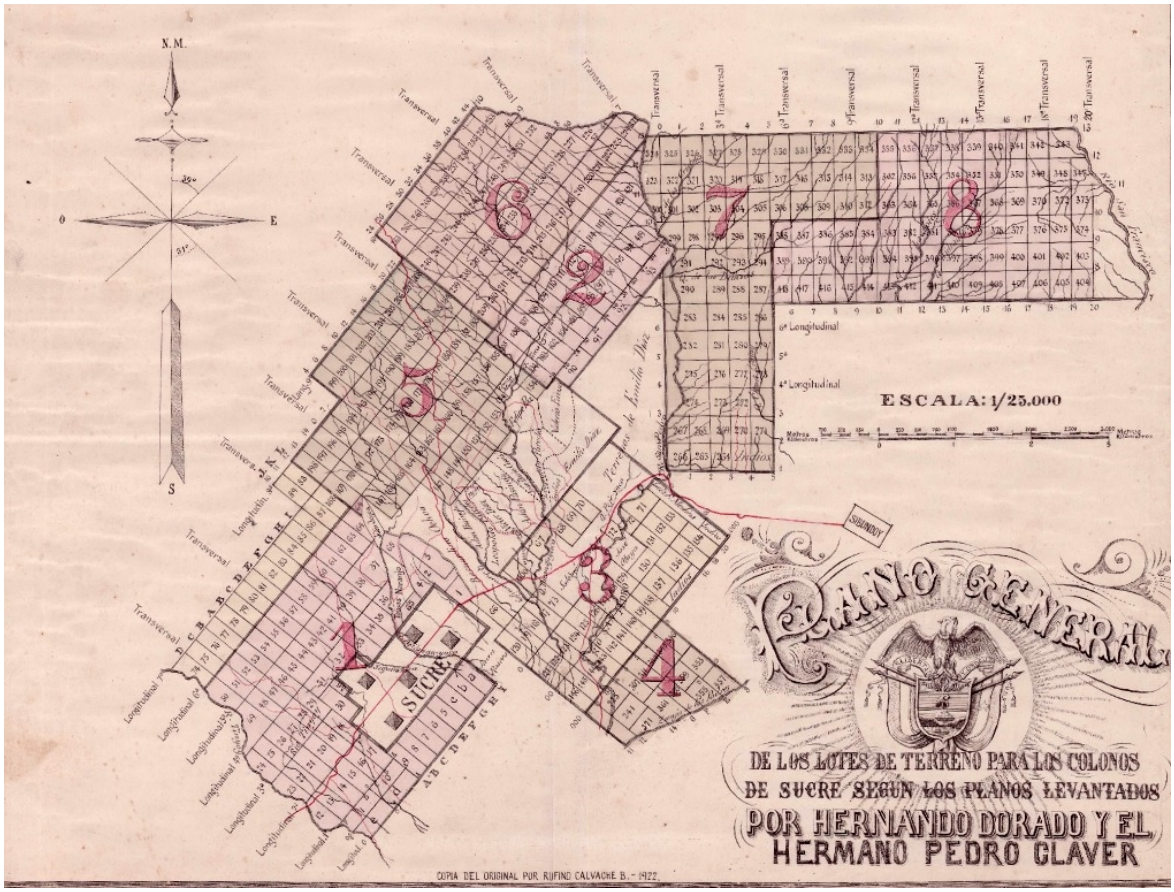
than two hundred years since we stopped being savages and entered civilised life, and therefore we are not subjected to their authority". [67]

Santiago, 1920 (Source: ADS, GT)

Fray de Montclar dismissed those claims as mere stratagems instigated by the "enemies" of the Mission, and particularly large landowners from Nariño eager to grab the indigenous lands. According to the Prefect, the latter constantly tried to bring the Sibundoy Indians, "under age" and "barely entering the road to civilisation", against the missionaries, so they could thwart the reform and seize their lands.[68] Whether the referred claims were the sole initiative of the Indians or incited by the missionaries' foes is not what matters here. What matters is, first, that these claims did not escape but were confined within the boundaries of the hegemonic language of state and frontier and, second, that the "excesses" of the Mission could hardly be avoided by the "authority" of the "Supreme Government", for the simple reason that the Mission embodied utterly such authority and government. Thus, and despite the protests and fierce resistance of Indians and "white" land-grabbers, the Apostolic Prefect's will prevailed. A Missionary chronicle filed in the Mission's archive of

[67] Indians from Santiago to President, 31 July 1914, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 4, n.f. (underline in original); see also Francisco Tisoy e hijos to President, 13 Oct. 1913, AGN, MG (4th), Vol.74, fol.52.
[68] *Informes sobre las misiones del Caquetá, Putumayo…*34.

Sibundoy contains the following entry for May 10th, 1916: "Official foundation of Sucre (today Colón)[69] after tenacious opposition from whites and Indians which alleged rights over the lands reserved for the new town. The advocate of this foundation was the F. Fidel de Montclar".[70]

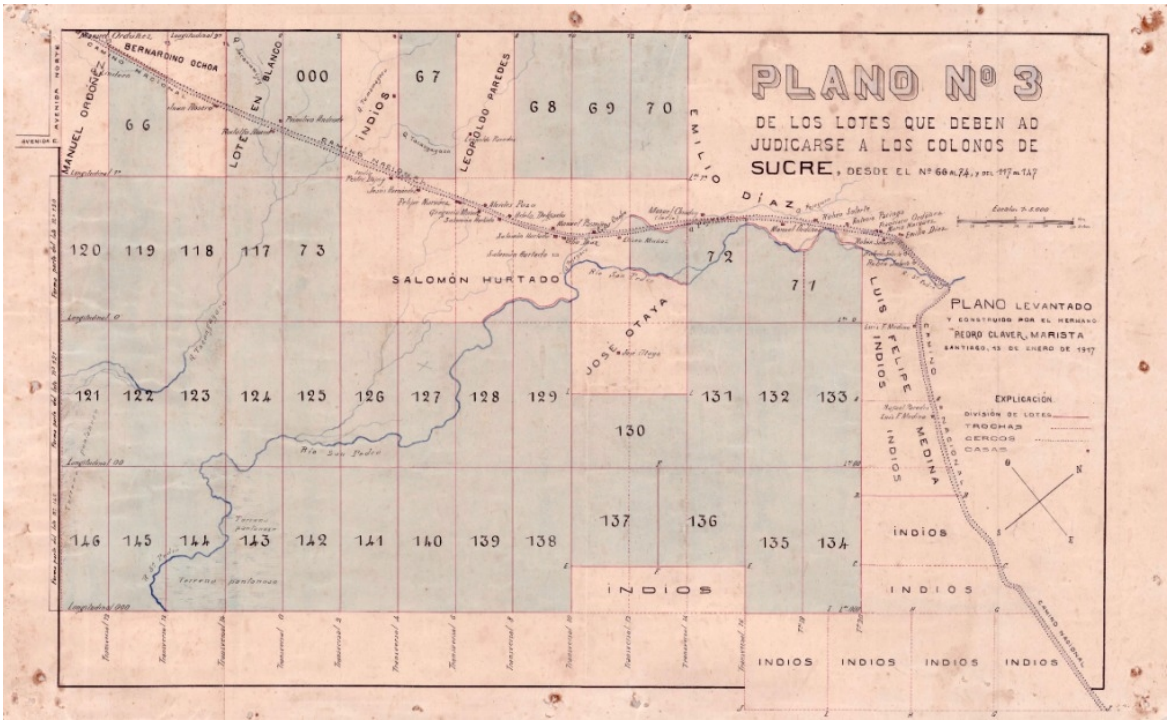


Copy of Sucre's 1917 cadastral plan, 1922 (Source: ADS, GT).

The "reserved" lands for Sucre consisted of a 10,000 hectares of terrain adjacent to the indigenous town of Santiago, and the place chosen for the new town was a spot seven kilometres east from the latter. The map displayed above corresponds to a copy of the cadastral plan for Sucre sketched in 1917. Each polygon, marked with big numbers in red, corresponds to a separate chart of a larger scale (Chart No.3 displayed below), which provides greater topographical and cadastral detail. The small grids, numbered from 1 to 418, represent the lots to be allocated or already allotted, most of which are ten hectares

[69] Sucre changed its name to Colón in 1936.
[70] "Crónica Misional del Putumayo (1893-1968)", ADS, Miscellany, n.f.

in area, as established by the Law 69 of 1914. The little square dots, meanwhile, indicate houses built outside the town, most of which are located along the road, fenced in most of its course as indicated by the dotted lines on both edges.



Sucre's cadastral plan, chart no.3 (Source: ADS, GT).

As with the Mission's statistical data, we can only take Sucre's cadastral plan as a partial, inaccurate, and highly simplified representation of *reality*. As noted by James Scott on the relation between cadastral surveying and state-making, there is always a big gulf between "facts on paper from facts on the ground".[71] This gulf does not solely stem from the accuracy issues resulting from the translation of data from the field to the paper, but from the fact that the legibility and order the surveyor aims to impose through the act of measuring and mapping is constantly altered, resisted, and subverted at the level of practice.[72] Nevertheless, and although this is actually the case with most of the Capuchin projects including the road, I consider that the crucial significance of Sucre's plan lies not so much in the degree to which the cartographic projection resembles the physical and social space it

[71] James Scott, *Seeing like a State. How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (Yale and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 49.
[72] This issue will be discussed at length in chapter 5.

aims to capture and transform; on the contrary, it rests in how through this distance the realm of representation not only appears detached from the reality it encloses, but it is granted such power that the image is no longer a reflection of the object but the object a projection of the image.

This movement of estrangement and inversion that we find reflected in Sucre's cadastral plan, on the other hand, is hardly differentiable from the logic of state-making rituals discussed in the previous chapter. It is also closely connected with Reyes' South America's map discussed in the first chapter, although there is a crucial difference between Reyes' chart and Sucre's plan: that whereas in the former we witness how the cartographer's rhetorical fiction acquires an illusion of reality, in the latter the distinction between fiction and reality and the binary conventions in which this distinction is sustained are no longer visible. And yet, it is precisely this absence that renders those conventions so overwhelmingly present in the image that we cannot avoid noticing them. Still, in order to bring them to the map's surface, we must consider Harley's remark on the nature maps, whose tracings, boundary lines, frames, grids, enclose as much as they exclude.[73] This is exactly what we are faced with when examining Sucre's plan: in filling the map with an intricate system of lines, dots and polygons, the cadastral surveyor simultaneously projects a new spatial and social order and silences and old one. Within this *creative destructive* process the natives, literally relegated to the margins of the map, are simultaneously included and excluded from this new order or, more exactly and going back to Agamben's state of exception, included by an act of exclusion. As for the "official" character of this new order, it is emphasised by the country's coat of arms drawn on the bottom right corner of the map, and whose motto reads "Freedom and order".

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According to Vilanova, the first settler arrived in Sucre the second of February, 1916.[74] By the end of that year, Fray de Montclar reported that 250 families had been already assigned

[73] Harley, *New nature,* 62.
[74] Vilanova, *Capuchinos Catalanes*, Vol.2, 50. *Informe sobre las Misiones del Putumayo*, 27.

home sites and land plots.[75] The friar showed himself optimistic about the increasing flow of colonisers and praised the advantages of Sucre for the Indians in the following terms: "As we have said before, in order to become civilised, the Indians require the contact of the whites; through them, they practically learn their customs which, as bad as they can be, belong to civilised peoples, and are thus less repugnant".[76] The 1917 Mission's report included a detailed census of Sucre which shows its rapid growth, significantly faster than Puerto Asís, and particularly remarkable if we consider that the town had barely a year of existence. The census, carried out on June 23rd, indicates that at that date, 68 houses had been built and 80 were under construction, the number of settlers reached 835 and the hectares farmed 225; however, a note at the bottom of the statistical appendix states that a month later (August 18), the number of built houses had increased to 95 and those under construction to 93.[77] According to the 1919 report, the number of settlers had increased to 2,000 and the houses built to 200. The town, adds the report, already has a church, a school, and a cemetery.[78]

The 1917 statistical appendix also counts 63 heads of cattle owned by settlers from Sucre, and 912 in the whole Valley, out of which 512 belonged to settlers and 400 to the Capuchin Mission. This detail is important since cattle, as much as humans, played a vital role within the twentieth century political ecology and environmental history of Sucre and the valley in general. The Mission's statistical reports for the following years omit information on this particular subject, although there exists evidence of the rapid expansion of pastureland and livestock in the Apostolic Prefecture, particularly the Sibundoy Valley. In 1916, Fray de Montclar reported that up to that year more than 500 rolls of barbed wire (half a million metres) had been spent to fence the Mission's cattle and agricultural lands in Sibundoy and Puerto Asís.[79]

[75] *Informe sobre las Misiones del Putumayo*, 27.
[76] *Informe sobre las Misiones del Putumayo*, 26.
[77] *Informes sobre las misiones del Caquetá, Putumayo,* 102-114.
[78] *Labor de los Misioneros en el Caquetá y Putumayo*, 39, 101.
[79] *Informe sobre las Misiones del Putumayo*, 43.

Four years later, in August 1920, the Capuchin friar submitted a thorough report to the Ministry of Public Works about the road and some of the most significant changes brought by it to the region. The road, noted De Montclar, had been particularly beneficial for the development of agriculture and cattle ranching, to the point that this activity was "transforming the region and its towns completely". "Ten years ago", he stated, "there were just a few heads of cattle in the whole Territory, not a horse, and nowadays there are various thousands, and a regular number being exported each year".[80] In 1922, he estimated that the number of bovine cattle, just in the valley, was no less than 7,000;[81] and in 1954, according to data provided by Bonilla, this figure reached 14,000, "almost all of which belonged to the white population".[82] These numbers alone shed some light on a long and complex story that is yet to be written, and which would help understand the conflictive society-nature relationship shaping the landscape and peoples of the Sibundoy valley.

Capuchin cattle farm in the Sibundoy valley, c. 1912 (Source: APCC)

[80] Fidel de Montclar to Ministry of Public Works, 15 August 1920, AGN, MOP, Vol.1412, fols. 458-468.
[81] N.t., 25 March 1922, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 21, n.f.
[82] Bonilla, *Servants,* 225.

Sibundoy pasture lands, 2010

Even by the missionaries' standards, Sucre was far from a successful experiment. In 1922, the Apostolic Prefect wrote a short account of Sucre in which, although noting that the town "prospers day by day", he also acknowledged that that same progress had been the cause of the persistent usurpation of the lands allotted to the Indians following the Law 51. The Capuchin superior washed his hands of this grave issue arguing that despite the Mission continually urging the Indians to preserve their lands, "unscrupulous" persons often "induced" them to sell. In addition, he stressed that those purchases were illegal since under the national laws, the Law 89 of 1890 specifically, the resguardos were inalienable. The friar thus concluded that unless the Indians were prevented to sell their plots they would soon be "without an inch of land and reduced to slave status".[83]

De Montclar's argument could not conceal a central contradiction: in having crusaded for the valley's agrarian reform, the Mission deliberately denied the indigenous property right claims and instead opted for the allocation of individual land parcels, hence breaking the

[83] N.t., 25 March 1922, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 21, n.f.

communal possession of lands guaranteed under the legal figure of resguardo. The long-term effects of the Capuchin "reform", just considering the issue of land tenure, would be dramatic. Rolf Wesche, a German geographer who studied the colonisation development in the region during the early 1960s, observed that of the approximately 2,500 families then occupying the valley, about 300 were landless, 700 owned land plots of less than three hectares and 300 from 3 to 5 hectares; most of these families, which according to the Wesche "eked out a miserable livelihood", belonged to the indigenous towns of Santiago and Sibundoy.[84] The Mission, on the other side of the spectrum, figured as the largest land owner in the valley, its properties amounting to more than a thousand hectares. This situation, which brought growing criticism upon the Catalan friars, would eventually explode with the publication of Bonilla's book in 1968 and finally led to the departure of the Mission from the Putumayo two years later.[85]

This is not the place to discuss in depth the Sibundoy agrarian conflicts or the role played by the Mission in this story. As mentioned earlier, in bringing some aspects related to the history of Sucre and Puerto Asís, the aim of this section has been primarily to situate the Capuchin road within the historical geography of state and frontier. The road, as emphasised, not only embodied a powerful hegemonic language that we can trace back to characters such as Codazzi and Reyes, but became a paramount symbol of the rituals and practices of state-making in the frontier. In this sense, Fray de Montclar was certainly right when he proclaimed the road as being the "precursor" of radical transformations in Putumayo. The colonisation of "vacant" territories by both "white settlers" and foreign animal and plant species, the extraction of all kinds of products from the forest, and the dispossession of the natives' lands and labour, are just some of the interwoven dynamics the Capuchin road not only daily witnessed but actively assisted. Yet, as most of the projects conceived by Fray de Montclar and his relentless army of Catalan friars, the road hardly matches the triumphal image it projected in its inauguration rituals and celebratory accounts. In this sense, as it will be described in the next section, the road was a project

[84] Wesche, *El Desarrollo*, 44-49.
[85] Bonilla, *Servants,* 274-276.

that, more than any other, speaks not just of the power and effects of myth and ritual but the large gap between myth, ritual, and reality.

The annihilation of theory in practice

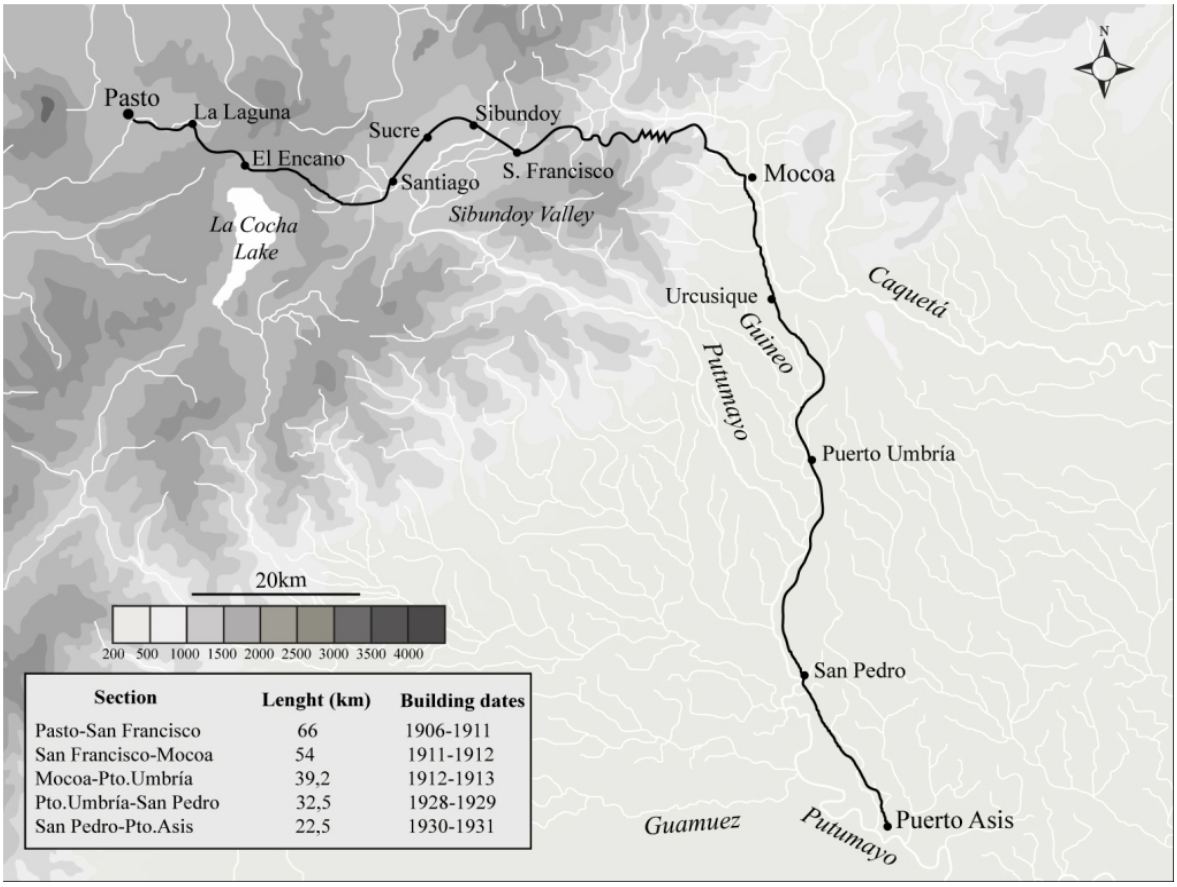
In December 1911, just a few days after Estanislao de Las Corts had announced the imminent arrival of the road to Mocoa, Fray de Montclar sent a letter to the Minister of Public Works. The Apostolic Prefect, with the project of Puerto Asís well underway and well aware of the government's desperate need of an access way to a navigable point on the Putumayo River, did not limit himself to announce the good news. Instead, he warned the Minister of the vital importance to extend the road to the future Colony and, in order to persuade the officer, argued that having already overcome the "Andes barrier", the missing section was an easy enterprise. Keeping the current number of workers (1,200) and with an additional budget of $30,000, the Mission, he assured, would be able to conclude the road in three months.[86] Three months later, and after having sent another missive to the Minister with some pictures attached of the Mission's heroic deed ("what remains is extremely easy, there are no more cliffs to break" he emphasised this time), the insistent friar had his way: the Ministry committed to continue sending $10,000 monthly and to evaluate the Apostolic Prefect's request of raising the budget so as to increase the number or workers to 2,000.[87] The road, nevertheless, and despite de Montclar's confident and ambitious prediction, did not arrive at Puerto Asís for a further three months. When it eventually did, nineteen years later, in 1931, the Apostolic Prefect would not be there to witness the event.

There is little doubt that Fray de Montclar highly underestimated the difficulty of building the almost 90 kilometres of road from Mocoa to Puerto Asís, and the friar himself would later acknowledge that this undertaking proved far from "extremely easy". The factors explaining why the project took that long and was so difficult to complete are many and have little to do with Fray de Montclar's miscalculation. Taken together, however, those

[86] AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.467-470.
[87] Fidel de Montclar to Ministry of Public Works, 20 Feb 1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.526v.

factors expose the gap between the coherent discursive logic of the state and the conflictive, contingent, and often messy everyday state practices.

Map 8. Pasto-Puerto Asís road. Road sections and building dates (1906-1931)[88]



Section	Lenght (km)	Building dates
Pasto-San Francisco	66	1906-1911
San Francisco-Mocoa	54	1911-1912
Mocoa-Pto.Umbría	39,2	1912-1913
Pto.Umbría-San Pedro	32,5	1928-1929
San Pedro-Pto.Asis	22,5	1930-1931

A first aspect that constituted a perpetual obstacle to the road was bureaucracy. The 1886 Constitution had replaced the prior federalist system for a centralist regime, a shift partly aimed at strengthening the political weight of Bogotá over the country's provinces. Although in theory this change did not affect so-called "Territorios nacionales" (national territories) or peripheral provinces which depended directly on the central government, in practice it made things more complicated. The Putumayo, for instance, having once belonged to the extensive *Territorio del Caquetá,* itself part of the former State of Cauca, was named an Intendancy in 1905 and Special Commissionership in 1912, administrative

[88] Elaborated by the author, based on AGN, MOP, Vol.408, n.f; Vol.3273, fol.241.

units heavily dependent on Bogotá. However, for many administrative, economic and political matters, the Putumayo also relied on the province of Nariño, a situation that in some ways persists to date. The road did not escape this double dependency from Bogotá and Pasto. As noted, the central government delegated the direction of the road works to Fray de Montclar but at the same time left the Governor of Nariño in charge of managing and overseeing the funds. For the Mission, this basically meant that it had to submit regular reports both to the Governor in Pasto and the Minister of Public Works in Bogotá, a situation that not only placed a heavy burden on the friars but often translated into bureaucratic inertia and delays in disbursements. This problem, moreover, was further magnified if we consider the long response times of official correspondence, an issue related with the long distances between the Putumayo and Bogotá and the country's precarious transport network. Therefore, while a telegram sent from Mocoa or Sibundoy to Bogotá usually took about a week to get a response, letters and reports could normally take between 30 and 50 days.[89]

A typical case exemplifying the above occurred in March 1912, around the same time the inauguration of the road to Mocoa was taking place. Just a few days before travelling to Mocoa with the commission appointed to inaugurate the road, Fray de Montclar was stuck in Pasto desperately trying to get a disbursement from Bogotá he had been waiting for since early February. The money, as the friar explained in a letter to Fray de Cardona, currently in charge of the road to Puerto Asís, had been frozen in Tumaco's customs house for several weeks. In order to deal with the anxious workers, the Apostolic Prefect ordered to persuade them to continue working for no pay while he resolved the impasse, even using the threat of no longer offering them work. Meanwhile, he had written to Bogotá, much farther from Tumaco than Pasto, in the hope that they could fix the problem from there and blaming the incident on the customs officer's incompetence.[90] A week later, on 8th March, he finally received funds from Tumaco, although just half of the expected sum. He therefore sent another telegram to the Minister of Public Works reporting the problem and complaining

[89] Estimation based on average time responses of letters, reports and telegrams from 1906 to 1932.
[90] Fray de Montclar to Fray de Cardona, 1 March 1912, ADS, folder 09-01, Camino al Oriente, n.f.

about the recurrent delays in the payments.[91] This time he got a prompt reply saying that the whole problem was due to a change of customs officer but that it had now been solved for good.[92]

The sporadic complaints about payment delays show that this situation not only persisted but sometimes ended up in workers' insubordination and desertion.[93] Bureaucratic difficulties, moreover, were far from restricted to delays in disbursements, and included budgetary constraints, slow decision making processes and temporal suspensions of contracts, amongst others. Still, if bureaucracy constituted a constant hassle for the Mission, everyday problems with workers and road users were never absent. Amongst these, the one that caused most damage to the road and became a perpetual headache to the friars was the dragging of wood along the road. This practice deserves special attention as it illustrates how the road was appropriated in ways different from those originally conceived, and how the coercive measures to control its users and uses were constantly resisted.

The extraction and transport of wood and charcoal constituted a traditional livelihood among the indigenous peoples inhabiting the surrounding areas of La Cocha Lake, 20 kilometres east from Pasto. This activity was highly damaging to the road, especially during the rainy seasons, when the heavy logs dragged by oxen along its surface formed deep trenches and quagmires. As early as 1909, when the section of the road from Pasto to La Cocha had just been concluded, de Las Corts notified the Governor of Pasto that due to this activity, several stretches were impassable and had now to be rebuilt. At the friar's request, the Governor issued a resolution later that year ordering the placing of permanent guards along the road to prevent this trade, a measure that soon proved futile. Six months later, in June 1910, the guards had all resigned arguing that they did not have the support of the

[91] AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.524.
[92] AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.525v.
[93] There are several cases illustrating this. See, for example: Fray de Montclar to Fray de Cardona, 01 Jan. 1913, ADS, folder 11-010-01, Camino Pasto-Puerto Asís, asuntos varios., n.f.; Peones del Camino to Minister of Public Works, 28 April 1913, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.463-464, 549; Fray Florentí de Barcelona to Fray Canet del Mar, 29 Oct. 1930, ADS, folder 11-10-01, Camino Pasto-Puerto Asís, n.f.

Nariño authorities and were a constant "object of mockery".[94] In October Fray de Las Corts, tired of sending complaints to Pasto with no results, opted to press the Governor from Bogotá notifying the Minister of Public Works about the time and high sums of money wasted to repair the road's damaged stretches.[95] This time the priest's pleas apparently had some effect. The Governor sanctioned a new decree contemplating several police measures for road users including fines for the dragging of wood,[96] and went even as far as requesting, although unsuccessfully, army soldiers to take control of the situation.[97]

In July 1912 Rufino Gutiérrez, a fiscal inspector sent by the central government to evaluate the road works, noted that there were currently some guards posted along the road, which had been given the order to imprison the Indians using beasts of burden, even if unloaded. The natives angrily protested against the measure, arguing that it was especially unfair not only because it only applied to them but since they had worked in the road for no pay. The prohibition, as the same officer acknowledged, was certainly unjust, particularly considering that the Capuchins had built a section of the road over the old trail the Indians had opened to transport their goods to Pasto. Gutiérrez therefore persuaded the Governor of Nariño to lift the ban and allow the traffic of animals as long as they didn't drag the loads, a condition that according to the officer the Indians "happily accepted".[98] Yet this "truce" didn't last long, and a few weeks later the situation was back to the beginning.[99]

Despite endless claims, coercive measures and conflicts, the Mission and civil authorities could never put an end to this practice. Ten years later, in November 1922, Fray Canet del Mar, at the time in charge of the road, sent a discouraging report to Bogotá in which he listed this activity together with rain as being the most critical problems currently affecting the Pasto-Sibundoy section. "The dragging of wood", lamented the Capuchin, "is one of the abuses we have tried to avoid most and yet without success, neither through the

[94] Fray de Las Corts to Minister of Public Works, 7 July 1910, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.297-299v.
[95] Fray de Las Corts to Minister of Public Works, 30 Oct. 1910, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fol.324.
[96] "Decreto No.426, noviembre 9 de 1991. Que contiene algunas disposiciones reglamentarias y de Policía sobre caminos", Pasto, Imprenta del Departamento, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.353-356v.
[97] AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.430v, 447.
[98] Gutiérrez, *Monografías,* 339.
[99] Guerrero to Ministry of Public Works, July 1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols. 589 -590v, 604-605.

surveillance of police nor the Governor of Pasto, who has intervened during different times at our request". To convince the Minister of the magnitude of the problem, the friar described the part of the road in the worst condition as a "mass slaughterhouse" and assured that if it remained un-repaired the Putumayo would soon be left "completely cut off from the rest of the Republic".[100] The high intensity of this traffic, as revealed by a census of products transported on the road in that year, suggests that despite his fatalistic tones Fray del Mar's gloomy picture may not have been far from reality. According to the census, between March 1922 and April 1923, 20,650 timber pieces of different dimensions and 62,400 arrobas of charcoal (around 390 tons) were transported from the Putumayo to Pasto.[101]

Once again, the missionaries attempted to curtail this practice, on this opportunity through the Putumayo's civil Commissary.[102] This time, the Indians sent the following telegram to the President where they vehemently expressed their frustration about the prohibition:

> Putumayo Commissary, in agreement Apostolic Prefect, under pretext preserving the east road, have forbidden the use of such road with oxen, hence they preclude us to exploit our lands…We built the road not long ago and maintained it with our own hands. Can it be possible, equitable, advantages civilisation only favouring privileged classes, Indians continue to be serfs? Respectfully entreat stop measure regressive Colony.[103]

This appeal, starkly exposing both the exclusionary politics of the Capuchin road and the indigenous subversion of the "whites" colonialist rhetoric, apparently remained unanswered. Thus the Indians, powerless to assert their rights within the realm of law, continued to negotiate their right to the road through the messy terrain of everyday conflict. At this point, however, the missionaries were exhausted from fighting another battle against an enemy much stronger and more harmful to the road than the Indians' oxen.

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[100] Fray Canet del Mar to Minister of Public Works, 4 Nov. 1922, AGN, MOP, Vol.1413, fols.30-33.
[101] "Carga transportada y vehículos que han recorrido la vía de Pasto al Putumayo durante el periodo de 1 de marzo de 1922 a 30 de abril de 1923", April 1923, AGN, MOP, Vol.1413, fol.94v.
[102] Mora to Minister of Public Works, 13 Nov. 1923, AGN, MOP, Vol.1413, fols.187-188.
[103] Indígenas de La Laguna to Presidente de la República, 27 March 1924, AGN, MOP, Vol.1413, fol.250.

This enemy was rain, which affected the road year after year, reminding everyone how illusory had been the seemingly powerful image of the Capuchin's *magnum opus* as man's exultant conquest of nature. Rain crudely revealed the gulf between the unpolluted state myths and rituals and the muddied everyday dramas of state making. The struggle against the rain, although varying in intensity, was never really absent from the history of the road, from its opening to its decline in the late 1920s. Still, of all the battles fought during those years, the one which took place in 1912 was exceptional since there was no other occasion when the line between loud triumph and failure was so dramatically exposed and staged.

The rainy season in the Putumayo usually extends from May to October and is characterised by abundant rainfall, especially in the foothills, a phenomenon associated to the dense clouds formed by the collision of the trade winds with the steep Andean mountains. During this period, the monthly precipitation levels normally reach 400 millimetres and the flow of the rivers descending the cordillera often becomes torrential. A technical report of the road elaborated in 1913 gives a sense of the difficult obstacle water represented for the construction of the road: between Pasto and the Sibundoy valley, the road had 50 culverts and pontoon bridges of different widths; from there to Mocoa, 72 culverts and small bridges from 4 to 8 metres long, and 12 between 10 and 12 metres; and from Mocoa to Puerto Asís, 71 culverts and bridges from 3 to 6 metres and 18 "large bridges" of lengths or spans varying from 12 to 30 metres.[104] Every rainy season, the infrastructure suffered serious damage. However, to the Capuchins, 1912 was especially critical not only because the rain hit harder than usual that year, but since no sooner had they completed the road from Pasto to Mocoa, in March, than they embarked on construction of the missing section to Puerto Asís. As the newly inaugurated section demanded regular maintenance and consolidation works in several parts, the friars now had to divide efforts between both sections, a burden that proved too much when the rains arrived.

[104] "Informe que rinde el ingeniero comisionado por el MOP para verificar una inspección al camino del Putumayo", AGG, MOP, Vol.1409, fols.327-328.

Culvert (bottom right) and bridge (centre left) on the Mocoa-Urcusique section, 1914 (Source: AGN, MOP, Vol.1410, fol.66).

Fray Florentino de Barcelona (on horse) crossing suspension bridge over Pepino river, section Mocoa-Urscusique, n.d. (Source: ADS, GT).

It is difficult to establish when exactly it started raining in 1912, but in June, just three months after the road to Mocoa had been completed, the situation was already critical. On the 21st of June, the Apostolic Prefect sent an anxious note to Fray de Cardona urging the friar to meet him in Mocoa at once to discuss the likely suspension of the works. "The carriers say that" -reads the note- "it is no longer possible to take a step forward since the páramo [Bordoncillo] is completely ruined with large depths, as is the case of Portachuelo and some parts around here. We are going to be cut off and unable to bring provisions".[105]

A few days later, the recently appointed Commissary, General Joaquín Escandón, wrote to the Minister of Government confirming the gravity of the situation:

> Regarding to state of the road from Pasto to this place [Mocoa] I am afraid to inform your honour, that thanks to a strong and prolonged winter most of the road has suffered grave damages due to collapsing of slopes and platforms and destruction of palisades in the flat and swampy areas, to the point that the traffic, even for pedestrian travellers, is now extremely difficult. In consequence, the missionaries decided to remove the crews working in the section from here to Puerto Asís in order to employ them in recomposing the road to Pasto.[106]

As rain continued to take its toll on the road, criticism of the missionaries, not so long ago loudly proclaimed as "heroes of civilisation", began to be heard. One of the Mission's most bitter enemies took advantage of the calamitous situation and sent an acrid missive to the Minister of Public Works sentencing that "the government has made the biggest mistake in trusting the Spanish Capuchins, ignorant of engineering, with the opening of the most important road for the Republic"; to which he next implored the Minister to "appoint an able body of engineers, honest, scientific; and put them in charge of the road and the military colonies".[107]

The Minister, possibly fearing that the negative campaign against the Mission could eventually involve him, and aware that the whole road was too great a burden for the friars,

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[105] Fray de Montclar to Fray de Cardona, 21 June 1912, ADS, folder 11-010-01, Camino Pasto-Puerto Asís asuntos varios, n.f.

[106] "Informe del Comisario de Mocoa al Ministro de Gobierno en el que informa de sobre el estado del camino", 1 July 1912, AGN, MG (4th), Vol.68, fols.303-306.

[107] Roberto Salazar to Minister of Public Works, 24 Aug 1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.48-53.

chose to hand over the Pasto-Mocoa section to a civil engineer from Pasto, a measure which Fray de Montclar took as a personal offence.[108] Visibly irritated and anxiously trying to persuade the Minister to revoke the measure, he wrote to him: "I foresee very serious problems as a consequence of the [new] arrangements. I think we don't deserve such a snub".[109] In fact, what de Montclar feared most was that, in losing control over the first section of the road, the one under construction, and in consequence the newly founded Colony, could be left adrift.

The Apostolic Prefect's concerns, as it soon turned out, were not unfounded. In September, as the rains intensified and the contract to meet the urgent repairs in the Pasto-Mocoa section awaited the bureaucratic procedures in Bogotá, the crews working on the road to Puerto Asís and the Colony itself were on the verge of collapse. Fray de Las Corts didn't stop sending dramatic updates of the situation to the Apostolic Prefect. "Since yesterday night until now, 4 P.M., the rain has not ceased for an instant and the rivers are flowing over the mountains" wrote the friar from Mocoa on 1st September, adding that in consequence he had to postpone his departure to Puerto Asís.[110] On 17th September, still stuck in Mocoa, he despairingly noted:

> The road is out of provisions. The workers do not work because they have nothing to eat, many have left from hunger…My absence from Puerto Asís had prevented me from sending them corn, I have given them some but it's not enough. Most of the Colony's workers have left from fear and there is no one to harvest corn.[111]

In October, Julio Thomas, the new engineer in charge of the Pasto-Mocoa section, elaborated a meticulous report describing the current state of the road and the most urgent repairs and improvements. Thomas acknowledged the Mission's work, especially in the difficult stretch from San Francisco to Mocoa, which he judged as "the main achievement of the Capuchin priests". He referred to the architect of this section, Fray de Las Corts, as "a

[108] "Resolución por la cual se mandan a organizar los trabajos de conservación y mejora de la parte construida del camino que conduce a de Pasto hacia el río Putumayo, por Mocoa", 30 Aug 1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.9-11.
[109] Fray de Montclar to Minister of Public Works, 3 Sept.1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.19-20.
[110] Fray de Las Corts to Fray de Montclar, 1 Sept.1912, ADS, folder 09-01, Camino al Oriente, n.f.
[111] Fray de Las Corts to Fray de Montclar, 17 Sept 1912, ADS, folder 09-01, Camino al Oriente, n.f.

vigorous man who defeated the abrupts (sic) at all cost" -and yet added- "perhaps without considering the technical aspects". The engineer, nevertheless, pointed out serious flaws in the road design and construction employing a technical jargon which made the missionaries look like naive amateurs. This clinical diagnosis regarded the organisation of works as "extremely defective", the solidification materials as "inconvenient", the bridges as "poorly built" for its most part, and the road width as "inadequate for the traffic needs". Even so, and perhaps conscious that earning Fray de Montclar's enmity was not a good idea after all, he attributed most of the problems to the government's pressure on the friars to get the road done in the shortest time possible.[112]

The Apostolic Prefect, not unexpectedly, not only did not take Thomas' observations well, but counterattacked straight away. Thus, in early November, while an official Commission sent upon his request to evaluate the Mission's work visited the road, he telegrammed the President sentencing: "National interest compels me to come to Y.E. [Your Excellency]. Road maintenance neglected…Procedure Engineer indicates interests impeding access Putumayo".[113] The commission's report was released on 14th November, and for its most part came out favourable to the Mission. The authors, two of which had been appointed by the Governor of Nariño and one by the Apostolic Prefect, praised the friars for the economy and speed of the works, attributed the current damages to the harsh rains and mostly to the pending consolidation works –not initially contemplated in the contract- and suggested some rectifications of the original layout and solidification works in most of the road. In summary, they noted that of the 150 kilometres built from Pasto to Puerto Asís only 15 could be considered to be "in bad condition and dangerous". The report also included a section on "observations" written by Fray de Montclar, where the priest blamed the current problems on the government's rush, the "extraordinary and never before seen winter", and the very high traffic of pack animals. Most remarkably, and in a statement that plainly exposed the fragile nature of the state myth so powerfully embodied by the road and reified by its inaugural rituals, the Mission's superior posed the following question: "will it be

[112] Thomas to Minister of Public Works, 20 Oct.1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.173-178v.
[113] Fray de Montclar to Presidente de la República, 7 Nov.1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fol.116.

claimed perhaps that, because the missionaries built this road, it should not be subjected to the *laws of nature*?"[114]

The 1912 winter certainly seems to have literally dragged the Apostolic Prefect backward to a Hobbesian *state of nature.* As it became evident that rain was an adversary he could not control, he lashed out against the critics of his prized project, often labelling them as "enemies", a situation exposing the friar's fear of anyone contesting the Mission's hegemonic dominance in the Putumayo. The dispute with Thomas concerning the Pasto-Mocoa section was just beginning and would gradually escalate into a frontal war of mutual accusations, gossip and intrigues through telegrams, letters, and the press. The Mocoa-Puerto Asís stretch was no better and would soon become another battlefront. In December the Civil Commissary, General Joaquín Escandón, the same who had written the laudatory report of the inauguration event, telegrammed to Bogotá notifying that the delay in the construction of the last 50 kilometres of road meant that this part had to be travelled by river, causing several shipwrecks and human losses. Escandón explicitly made the missionaries responsible for the accidents, noting that they had "resisted" widening the existent trail to allow overland traffic.[115] This telegram would mark the beginning of a harsh conflict which soon moved from the road to the ongoing land disputes in the Sibundoy Valley, and in which the Apostolic Prefect would eventually prevail over the civil officer.[116]

The quarrels and disputes in which the Apostolic Prefect engaged ultimately led to a vicious circle with no end in sight. In conceiving the road as a vital appendage of the Mission's dominance in Putumayo, the Capuchin priest fiercely reacted to any criticism or attempt to snatch it from his hands, consistently labelling the road's critics as "enemies" of the Mission, a situation exposing the friar's fear of anyone contesting such dominance. This in turn led to endless conflicts where the most affected part ended up being the road itself. Nowhere was this deadlock better portrayed than in the fragment quoted below from a letter sent by Fray de Las Corts to Fray de Cardona in January 1913:

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[114] "Informe de la Comisión nombrada por el Gobierno Departamental de Nariño para inspeccionar la vía" 1912, Imprenta del Departamento, Pasto, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.299-313v (emphasis added).
[115] Escandón to Minister of Public Works, 5 Dec. 1912, ANG, MOP, Vol.1408, fol.160; *See also* fols.236-258.
[116] A detailed description of this conflict can be found in Bonilla, *Servants,* 113-122.

> I tell you with deep regret that the current situation of the road is I believe the most distressing. Numerous times I told the F. Prefect to leave the [road] works; he had done so gladly but the situation is so terrible in every sense because of the incessant wars of enemies and friends, that there is no way to know where to steer the course in the midst of such a furious squall. God help us.[117]

The "squall" did reach its height a few weeks later, although in a totally unanticipated way. On 14th February, Fray de Montclar got a telegram from the Minister of Public Works ordering the indefinite suspension of the works due to lack of government funds. To the Mission, owing a large sum of money in back wages and provisions and having completed just a third of the Mocoa-Puerto Asís section, the measure came as a bucket of cold water. The Apostolic Prefect, having declared a year earlier that this section was an "extremely easy" task and could be accomplished in 3 months, had no choice but to admit that his estimate had been far too premature. However, in a public letter published in Pasto and entitled "The suspension of the road to Putumayo and its causes", he fervently attributed the Mission's "lack of caution" and "financial indiscretions" to its "excessive love" for the two "great ideals" it had been entrusted with: the "defence of Colombia's sovereignty" and the "Christian civilisation of the Putumayo". Then, as the skilful statesman he was, the Capuchin sovereign wrote: "If all this is a crime, we plead guilty before the nation and the Province [of Nariño]".[118] Fray de Montclar must have thought that thanks to his infallible argument he would get away with it, and it certainly represented a victory to the Mission. Yet, what the friar perhaps did not realise was that the drama of the road, far from over, was just beginning.

Stagnation and decay

The years that followed the 1912 events can be considered to a large extent to be a cyclical repetition of the same drama, although performed with less intensity and by occasional novel actors on stage. Fray de Montclar's rhetoric defence following the suspension of the road managed to persuade the government to pay all the debts the Mission had contracted,

[117] Fray de Las Corts to Fray de Cardona, 2 Jan.1913, ADS, folder 09-01, Camino al Oriente, n.f.
[118] "La Suspensión del camino y sus motivos", Marzo 1913, Imprenta de la Diócesis, Pasto, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo,Box.1, n.f.

which in February 1913 amounted to $26,500 pesos. However, the road was eventually removed from the hands of the Mission. In June of that year, the section under construction was left in charge of the military force stationed in Puerto Asís, and in March 1914 Thomas was appointed Engineer Director of the entire road.[119] The new arrangements did not deter the Apostolic Prefect from continuing to conspire against Thomas by every possible means, from sending telegrams to Bogotá and publishing press articles accusing the engineer of having abandoned the works and deceiving the government, to encouraging insubordination among the workers and foremen. Thomas initially replied in the same terms, but in the long run, the Mission ended up being too big an adversary, and the engineer finally resigned from his post in 1914.[120]

In August 1915 the government concessioned the road through public tender, and the winning contractor committed to finish the missing section and to repair and consolidate the built sections within 26 months.[121] A year and a half later, Fray de Montclar, exasperated by the little progress made so far, began a new campaign against the contractor. He sent a memoranduml to the Minister of Public Works regretting the total "incompetence" and "indifference" of the contractor towards the road and urged him to rescind the contract at once, assuring that with the current procedures the road would not be completed "not even in twenty centuries".[122]

[119] "Resolución que reorganiza los trabajos del camino al Putumayo", 14 March 1914, AGN, MOP, Vol.1409, fols.505-506.

[120] On the conflict between Thomas and the Capuchin Mission see: "Defensa de los R.P. Capuchinos y contestación a un informe calumnioso de don Julio Thomas", 30 April 1913, AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.579-589; AGN, MOP, Vol.1408, fols.549, 562-564v, 599; "Injusticias en el Putumayo", *Nuevo Tiempo*, June 27, 1913; APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Press, n.f.; "Sección Misiones", Deber No.86, 15 April 1914, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Press, n.f.

[121] "Contrato celebrado en licitación pública con el Sr. Vicente Micolta C., para la mejora, terminación y conservación del camino de Pasto a Puerto Asís", 13 Sept. 1915, AGN, MOP, Vol.1411, fols.391-393v.

[122] Fray de Montclar to Minister of Public Works, 13 March 1917, AGN, MOP, Vol.1411, fols.487-490.

Capuchin friar and army officers on the road from Mocoa to Puerto Asís, n.d. (Source: ADS, GT)

In August 1917 and following the friar's denunciations, the Minister sent an inspector to evaluate the state of the road, who concluded that the contractor had not met its obligations and the road was totally neglected.[123] The government finally cancelled the contract in December,[124] an occasion that seemed propitious for the Apostolic Prefect to regain control of the road. Therefore, after the same inspector recommended to hand the road back to the Capuchins, whom he described as "very laborious, selfless, and competent",[125] the friar, noticeably triumphant, wrote to the Minister in May 1918 saying that the he had "no wish" to take charge of the road, and yet he added that: "but the deep certainty that we have, confirmed by the facts, that the road will not be finished unless the Mission takes care of it, prompt us to face every difficulty that might arise and to ignore the

[123] "Visitaduría Fiscal", 12 August 1917, AGN, MOP, Vol.1411, fol.578.
[124] "Contrato por el cual se resuelve el relativo al camino del Putumayo", 6 Dec. 1917, AGN, MOP, Vol.1911, fols.660-662v.
[125] Márquez to Minister of Public Works, AGN, MOP, Vol.1412, fols.43-46.

calumnies and intrigues of our enemies".[126] And so the road returned once again to the Capuchins' hands –though not as soon as Fray de Montclar had wished: budgetary constraints, bureaucratic obstacles and inertia in Bogotá and Pasto delayed the contract with the Mission for fifteen months.[127] Meanwhile the road, neglected and left to the mercy of nature, continued its decay, a desolate landscape condensed in a short telegram sent from Mocoa to Bogotá in June 1919: "National road totally abandoned. From here to San Francisco thirty landslides; from here to Umbría, all bridges destroyed. Winter continues harsh".[128]

The Mission took charge of the road in August 1919 and during the next four and a half years struggled against its customary human and non-human foes. Then, in May 1924, the Ministry of Public Works suddenly issued a resolution declaring the contract with the Mission as being dissolved due to "unsatisfactory execution of works".[129] The Apostolic Prefect, enraged, fiercely refuted the government's verdict in the press arguing that the meagre budget assigned to the road was barely enough to keep the built part passable.[130] Regardless of who was right or wrong, the fact is that since 1913, when the government withdrew the road from the Capuchins for the first time, it had not advanced a single kilometre beyond Puerto Umbría, half way between Mocoa and Puerto Asís. A new contract was signed in June with another engineer from Pasto and Fray de Montclar was designated as "Inspector of Works". This arrangement, however, scarcely lasted six months. In February 1925, the government issued another decree establishing that due to the small allowance voted in Congress for the road that year, the position of engineer was suppressed and the road would be left in charge of the Apostolic Prefect, now titled "Manager Inspector".[131]

[126] Fray de Montclar to Minister of Public Works, 6 May 1918, AGN, MOP, Vol.1412, fols.63-68.
[127] AGN, MOP, Vol.1412, fols.60-62, 129, 163-163, 173-177.
[128] León to Minister of Public Works, 16 June 1919, AGN, MOP, Vol.1412, fol.146v.
[129] "Resolución No.11, Por la cual se declara administrativamente caducado un contrato", 29 May 1924, AGN, MOP, Vol.1413, fol.294.
[130] "Algo por la verdad", *El Nuevo Tiempo* No.7719, July 4, 1924; "El Camino al Putumayo", *El Nuevo Tiempo* No.7708, June 23, 1924, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Press, n.f.
[131] "Decreto ejecutivo No.213. Por el cual se reorganizan los trabajos de Pasto a Puerto Asís", 10 Feb.1925, AGN, MOP, Vol.1414, fol.32.

Road crew, Mocoa-Puerto Asís section, 1928 (Source: APCC)

The new monthly budget assigned to the road, $416 pesos in contrast to the peak of $10,000 reached in 1911, was certainly a derisory sum to maintain the existent road and complete the missing 50 kilometres from Umbría to Puerto Asís. During the next four years, although another 30 kilometres of road were built (between 1928 and 1929), its critical situation hardly improved. During that time the central government, despite the incessant claims of the missionaries and settlers, suspended or delayed the payments persistently arguing fiscal constraints and budgetary crises.[132] This situation reached a dramatic climax in 1929, when no budget was approved for the road. In December 1928, as soon as the news reached the Putumayo, Fray Canet del Mar, currently in charge of the road, unsuccessfully wrote to Bogotá imploring the measure to be reconsidered.[133] During the subsequent months, the Capuchin friar and the same settlers who years before had come to the Putumayo driven by the illusion of the road, sent numerous letters and telegrams to Bogotá begging for a solution and reproaching the "abandonment" –a staple word in Putumayo since immemorial times- to which they were subjected by the government. The

[132] See: ANG, MOP, Vol.1414, fols.115-119, 351-355, 415-421, Vol.1415, fols.279-283, Vol.1440, fols.120-121; Vecinos de Puerto Umbría to President of Senate, 9 Aug 1926, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box.3.
[133] Fray Canet del Mar to Ministry of Public Works, 28 Dec. 1928, AGN, MOP, Vol.1415, fols.424-426.

following telegram, authored by the settlers from Mocoa, bluntly summarises the frustration and despair of the neglected frontier peoples:

> If government left us complete oblivion, we will die isolated…widespread discouragement discontent colonos, we have right to be assisted preferentially rest of nation because we have diminished at the expense sacrifices sustaining unscathed sovereignty home soil; we don't ask for roads, railroads but demand conservation only gateway. We hope to be assisted, otherwise will emigrate forfeiting what has costs us plenty of sweat, with prejudices government's good name, which neglects weak peoples, ignoring we all have right to budget because contribute with contingent and our own lives in unhealthy climates afar prerogatives civilised world.[134]

No response is recorded for this message. Others were eventually answered, although the responses are almost invariably the same: a four or five-line impersonal missive regretting the situation and yet informing that problems of "fiscal order" precluded any short-term solution.[135]

As happened two decades before, the road would have to wait for another extraordinary event to momentarily escape its neglected condition. This moment came in 1932, when the long-feared military conflict with Peru finally occurred. On 26th September, less than a month after conflict started, the Pasto-Puerto Asís road, the last 22 kilometres of which had been completed in 1931, was classified as a "national defence" road. Its repair and improvement were graded as of "immediate urgency" and for this purpose a budget of $120,000 pesos was allocated.[136] Three months later Rafael Agudelo, the new engineer in charge of the works, submitted an extensive report where he strongly argued that apart from the urgent widening of the whole road to allow vehicle traffic, the section between San Francisco and Mocoa had to be replaced totally. The engineer's verdict, marking both the death sentence to the Capuchins' most praised section of the road and the beginning of another never-ending story, reads:

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[134] Vecinos de Mocoa to Ministers of Works, Industry, Associated Press, 11 March 1929, ANG, MOP, Vol.1415, fols.437-438.

[135] Vecinos de Mocoa to President, 26 Feb 1929, AGN, MOP, Vol.1440, fols.131-134; Vecinos de Sucre to Ministers of Government, Industry, Treasure, Public Works, 12 July 1919, AGN, MOP, Vol.1415, fols.469-471; Fray Canet del Mar to Minister of Public Works, 10 May 1929, AGN, MOP, Vol.1415, fols.289-291.

[136] "Decreto 1549. Por el cual se dispone la ejecución de algunos trabajos", 26 Sept. 1932, AGN, MOP, Vol.3273, fols.1-3; "Decreto 1581. Por el cual se fija el plan de trabajo que debe adoptarse en algunas vías", 28 Sept.1932, AGN, MOP, Vol.0318, fols.8-11; AGN, MOP, Vol.3278, fol.36.

> This road, as it is now, had existed since many years and, due to its bad technical conditions, none of the ends pursued by communication ways had been achieved, neither the cheapening of transport nor the development of public wealth. Neither can it be concealed that, as a strategic way, it's little less than an eyesore.[137]

"Colombian army and Capuchin Mission on the Putumayo River shores" (c. 1933; Source: ADS, GT).

Fray de Montclar was not there anymore to rise up against the engineer's ruthless judgement. Sick and aged, the once almighty Apostolic Prefect had left the Putumayo for good in 1928. He died in Spain six years later, on 21st March 1934, at the age of 66. Various obituaries highlighted the road as his most significant mark in the Putumayo, and recalled one more time the story of how thanks to the Catalan priest this "utopian" ideal had become a reality.[138] A chronicle narrating his posthumous tributes celebrated in the Putumayo effusively declared that:

> After his gigantic and uneven struggles against a rebellious nature, against savages obstinate in fatal superstitions, against countless emissaries of darkness, his funerals celebrated in the Mission of Caquetá constituted a new triumph. There, a transformed nature could be observed. Mourning his death and praying for the soul of his benefactor,

[137] Rafael Agudelo to Minister of Public Works, 11 Dec. 1932, AGN, MOP, Vol.3273, fols.199-214, fol.210.
[138] "Documentos referentes a la muerte del Rvmo. Padre Fidel de Montclar. Acaecida en el Convencto de Arenys de Mar (España) el 21 de marzo de 1934", ADS, Fidel de Montclar, n.f.

attended once savage tribes that, in ignorant and tragic opposition, had confronted all the works of progress that would come to redeem them.[139]

Fray de Montclar supervising the road works on the Mocoa-Puerto Asís section, 1927 (Source: APCC)

State and frontier revisited

Fray de Montclar's posthumous triumphal image strikingly contrasts with the countless reports, telegrams and letters regarding the deplorable state of the Mission's flagship project during his last years in Putumayo and Spain. The picture above, showing the Apostolic Prefect supervising the road works in 1927, 15 years after the road was supposed to have reached Puerto Asís and not long before he moved to Spain for good, make it hard to believe that at this point the friar remained as enthusiastic about this project as he was in 1912. The many obstacles against which he battled incessantly -for the most part in vain- for more than two decades surely shook his faith in this "redeeming enterprise". In the end,

[139] "El célebre misionero de la Amazonia Colombiana", *El Derecho* No.754, March 24, 1934, ADS, Fidel de Montclar, n.f.

nevertheless, it was not bureaucracy, nor the dragging of wood, nor even rain what ultimately frustrated his dream of seeing the road concluded. Those constituted everyday obstacles that, as has been illustrated, largely account for the turbulent history of the road and lay bare the gap between the discursive and material practices of state-making.

However, beyond the road's everyday drama what this story reveals is a structural element deeply ingrained within the spatial and historical relationship between state and frontier. For it is no accident that, despite the expectations of wealth and civilisation it aroused, despite the relentless pleas of missionaries and colonisers, the road remained largely neglected by the central government except when its existence seemed vital to preserve the physical integrity of the country. Fray de Montclar himself expressed this situation well in one of the many letters he sent to Bogotá questioning the government's inattention towards the road. In referring to the events that followed the episode of La Pedrera in 1911, he declared that: "once the danger was warded off, the armed force was removed from Puerto Asís, and the government lost interest in the conclusion of the ten leagues of road needed to reach a navigable point in the Putumayo river, such as Puerto Asís, and neither displayed great commitment in solidifying and building the bridges over the many rivers that traversed by the road".[140] A few years later, when the Apostolic Prefect had already left the Putumayo and resigned his post as Apostolic Prefect, Fray Florentino de Barcelona –then director of road works- "unofficially" expressed a similar opinion in the following fragment of a letter sent to a friar colleague:

> My supreme ideal would be to be able to deliver the section of Umbría-Asís decently, subject of two contracts with the Government, since from Umbría to Pasto we could say that [the road] had been in use for almost twenty years, and some benefit might have accrued to the territory, at least to allow the entrance of people, even though they are now not able to exit; in that way colonisation is consolidated, keeping them in a jail or prison…[141]

At first glance, Fray de Barcelona's sarcastic statement seems like a conspiracy delusion of a friar exhausted of vainly struggling against a remote central government. Indeed, it is

[140] Fray de Montclar to Minister of Public Works, 16 April 1926, AGN, MOP, Vol.1414, fols.415-421.
[141] Fray Florentino de Barcelona to Fray Canet del Mar, 4 Nov.1930, ADS, folder 11-10-01, Camino Pasto-Puerto Asís, n.f

difficult to imagine that the road could have intentionally been conceived as a non-return way to this peripheral territory. Besides, there is no reason to believe that this infrastructure was not intended to fulfil in practice the ends it symbolised in theory and, although in a very precarious and unstable way, parts of those ends were accomplished. The road became the main access way for the colonisers from Nariño and other provinces which gradually populated the Putumayo foothills and lowlands, assisted the Capuchin's goal of extending their evangelisation activity across the region, and was instrumental to the government's imperative need of securing the country's territorial sovereignty. Yet, in another sense, the Capuchin priest's metaphorical association of the Putumayo with a prison –together with the numerous telegrams of colonos to the government expressing their feeling of confinement and neglect- cannot be more suitable to describe the relation of *inclusive exclusion* so pervasively present in the historical geography of state and frontier.

This association brings us back to the principle of hegemony introduced at the beginning of the chapter. According to Gramsci, "hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed".[142] Since his reading of hegemony is largely about understanding class domination under capitalism, he emphasises on the economic nature of such compromise or sacrifices required for achieving and maintaining consent. Nevertheless -and this is a central aspect of hegemony- Gramsci maintains that "such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic".[143]

As noted, my concern with hegemony is not about class relations but the historical and spatial relationship between state and frontier in the Colombian context. In this sense, the sort of conflicts and struggles I described in the chapter are fundamentally different to those implied in Gramsci's analysis. However, the reason why I consider this concept relevant is because it allows us to conceive domination as coexisting with struggle, instability, and conflict. Moreover, in linking hegemony with the state –or conversely, in conceiving the

[142] Gramsci, *Notebooks*, 161.
[143] Gramsci, *Notebooks*, 161.

state in terms of hegemony– it has been stressed how the state functions simultaneously as an abstract and concrete or ideological and material force.

It is only by considering these two dimensions of the state that I suggest we can see the history of the road as an event that plainly reveals the hegemonic character of the relationship between frontier and sate. As shown, this history is marked by countless conflicts, disputes and struggles, which together exposed the gap between the rhetoric and practices of state making. And yet, on the other hand, this is a history that despite conflict and struggle speaks of continuity and perpetuation. Fray de Barcelona's image of the Putumayo as a prison is enlightening precisely in this sense: because it speaks of the immutability of the image itself. This is an image that reminds us of Reyes thirty years before when he saw the Putumayo as a perfect place of exile for his political enemies; as Reyes' image reminds us of Fray de Montclar's first picture of the territory entrusted to him as an incommensurable and isolated jungle disputed between the jaguar and the "cannibal" Indians; as Fray de Montclar's picture reminds us of Codazzi's judgment of the *Territorio del Caquetá* as a place as "backward" and "savage" as the "new world" Columbus encountered; and so on.

All these characters imagined plans and projects –roads, railroads, navigation schemes, "white" immigration, evangelisation- to "civilise" and "develop" the frontier and its inexhaustible and unexploited riches. Yet at the same time all these plans and projects depended on the frontier to retain its condition of frontier, or in other words, its image of "backwardness" and "savagery" which defined its terms of inclusion to the order of the state and sustained both its civilising fiction and the violence underlying the fiction. This condition, to go back to Gramsci, constitutes the "essential" that cannot be "touched" and which ultimately defines the hegemonic nature of the state-frontier relationship. This, however, is just half of the story. The other half, which I shall attempt to describe in the remaining chapters, is about how frontier peoples, though without totally escaping this relationship, make sense of and challenge it in everyday life.

Part II

Chapter 4
The Trampoline of death

"Discipline" -writes Foucault- "is essentially centripetal…discipline functions to the extent that it isolates a space, that it determines a segment. Discipline concentrates, focuses, and encloses. This first action of discipline is in fact to circumscribe a space in which its power and the mechanisms of its power will function fully and without limit".[1] Whether we assume the state as the primal *source* of power or the *effect* of governmental technologies, this notion is crucial to grasp its relationship with the frontier. In trying to elucidate the origins of this relationship, I have drawn on Agamben's concept of "state of exception" or, as previously noted, a state that stems from "the extreme form of relation by which something is included solely through its exclusion".[2] The core aspect of this concept, which Agamben borrowed from Carl Schmitt and closely resembles Foucault's remark on discipline, points towards the idea that the validity of a juridical-political order ultimately depends on the delimitation of a space "in which it is possible to trace borders between inside and outside and in which determinate rules can be assigned to determinate territories".[3]

There are three interrelated arguments that have so far been advanced and stem from this conceptual framework. Firstly, the frontier does not constitute a *territory* excluded from the order of the state but a space -and more broadly a *condition*- embodying a relation of *inclusive exclusion*, independent of the ways (political, geographical, social) in which this relation is expressed or encountered. Secondly, this relationship, whose origins in the

[1] Michel Foucault, *Security, territory, population. Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978* (London: Palgrave, 2007) 44-45.
[2] Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 18.
[3] Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 21.

specific context of the Putumayo we have traced back to the colonial discursive and material practices of domination and control, is *immanent* within the foundational myth of the modern (postcolonial) state. And thirdly, as long as this myth is founded and sustained on a series of dualisms or binary oppositions –"civilisation" vs. "savagery", "nature" vs. "culture", "state" vs. "frontier", "centre" vs. "periphery"-, the relation between frontier and state is by definition indissoluble –that is, that although state and frontier often appear as two irreconcilable orders, the latter represents not an obstacle but a condition of possibility in which the former's legitimacy and power is rooted and maintained.

A crucial question that arises from these arguments is how to deal with this relation of *inclusive exclusion* beyond the rhetorical framework in which it is grounded or, alternatively, how can we locate power in the dialectical movement from myth to practice? In addressing this question, I have attempted to show how the state functions simultaneously as an ideological and material force, and how these two dimensions of power are manifested in the space of the road and the different practices associated to it. In doing so, I have also stressed the importance of conceiving the road as an infrastructure that is both physical and discursive.

It is only by considering these two dimensions of the state and the road that I suggest we can understand the significance and hegemonic character of this relationship in the historical geography of state and frontier. The image of the Putumayo as a "prison" referred in the previous chapter is revealing precisely in this sense –because it reveals how hegemony ultimately depends not on how successful or not are the many projects and plans by which the state attempts to dominate and control a given space or population, but how *through* them -or even in spite of them- the rhetorical fiction in which its power is grounded is perpetuated. Yet, as noted, this image alone does not account for the different ways in which the frontier, though never entirely escaping this relationship, has and continues to deal with it, contest it, and subvert it.

This chapter and the two that follow aim to continue the examination of this relation of *inclusive exclusion*, but now refocusing the analysis from the angle of the state to that of

the frontier. In this chapter, I am especially concerned with how people at the frontier make sense of some of the *perceived* and *lived* realities that the road symbolises: abandonment, neglect, isolation, death, confinement, anger, fear. Making sense of these realities always involves an act or a process that is simultaneously historical and spatial. For most Putumayenses, to talk about the road is to talk about a space that is saturated with historical events and memories through which they imagine and locate themselves in relation to the state: past and present struggles, unfulfilled promises and expectations, enduring feelings of exclusion and desires of inclusion. In the same way, these events and memories are deeply imprinted and only fully make sense in the everyday intricate geography of the road: its hairpins and precipitous curves, broken surfaces, landslides, police and army checkpoints, scattered shrines and crosses.

But making sense of the road is also and fundamentally a political practice. By locating, tracing and connecting those memories and events in *time* and *space*, history and geography are inexorably invested with a moral content through which people situate and imagine themselves and others as moral subjects.[4] Through this moral geography and history, the rhetoric of "progress", "civilisation" and "modernity" that the road so powerfully embodied but never fulfilled is appropriated and turned into an array of economic, social and political universal claims not only about people's past and present but their probable futures. The biggest paradox of such claims is perhaps, as noted by Tsing, that they both empower and give voice to the marginalised whilst at the same time expand hegemonic forms of power.[5] The characters introduced in this chapter draw attention to this paradox, specifically in the way in which they produce or reproduce narratives which privilege some histories, characters and events whilst silencing others. In other words, these

[4] On this notion of "moral geography" see, particularly, Philip Thomas, "The river, the road, and the rural-urban divide: a postcolonial moral geography from southeast Madagascar", *American Ethnologist* 29, 2, (2002): 366-391. See also Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox, "'Otherwise engaged' Culture, deviance and the quest for connectivity through road construction", Journal of Cultural Economy, vol.1, no.1 (2008): 79-92; Laurent Thevenot, "Which road to follow? The moral complexity of an 'equipped' humanity" in *Complexities: Social Studies of Knowledge Practices*, eds. John Law and Annemarie Mol, 53-87, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002).

[5] Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 8-9.

narratives speak of how hegemony is both contested and reproduced in the space of the frontier.

The chapter is structured in three parts. The first (sections 1 and 2) takes up the history of the Capuchin road in its last years and relates how it was eventually transformed to be suitable for motor vehicles, emphasising the central role it played both in the region's history and in the life of the peoples that daily depended on it. This is a story of promise and despair, emerging both from the redemptive power that roads were imagined to have in the life of the frontier and the many dramas they involved in practice. The Putumayo road fully exemplifies this story and has become with time one of the most pervasive symbols through which the *inclusive exclusive* relationship between state and frontier is exposed. The second part is built around a series of individual narratives around the road and seeks to cast light on how particular people make sense of this infrastructure in the different levels previously mentioned: spatial, historical, and political. Although each narrative might emphasise any of these levels, they all relate to the three in different ways. Finally, in the last part, I go back to question how these narratives represent both forms of contestation and reproduction of this relation of *inclusive exclusion*, and stress the significance of this twofold dimension in the historical geography of state and frontier.

A frontier highway

The land route connecting the Andean city of Pasto with the port town of Puerto Asís took a quarter of a century to be concluded. Rafael Reyes, who had first envisioned the road back in the 1870s, died in 1921, 15 years after the Capuchin missionaries had begun its construction and ten before it finally reached its end destination. Fray Fidel de Montclar, who fervently embraced the project and for more than two decades struggled continuously against its countless obstacles, left the Putumayo without seeing it finished. Moreover, and an ironic epitaph for this calamitous project, by the time it was finally concluded, in July 1931, it was unable to meet transport needs, a situation that would soon become evident during the armed conflict with Peru. Still, the story of how the three-metre wide 215-kilometre "camino de herradura" or bridle path that brought so much eulogies, travails and

nightmares to the Apostolic Prefect and his fellow missionaries became a "modern" motor road is as long and dramatic as its predecessor's.

As early as 1925, when a significant chunk of the road to Puerto Asís was still unfinished, a national law decreed the upgrade of its first 25 kilometres -from Pasto to La Cocha lake- to a "carreteable" or a road suitable for wheeled vehicles. Two different teams of engineers were contracted between 1926 and 1927 to carry out the layout design and construction works finally began in December 1927.[6] Between that date and July 1928, according to a report submitted by Jeremías Bucheli, chief engineer of works, the layout was completed and 5.2 kilometres of road had been built. Although in some parts the new road followed a different route than the old one, the works largely consisted of the widening, to 8 metres, including ditches, and improvement of the latter's surface.[7] Apparently, things were initially going well and the main problem so far, as reported by Bucheli, had been that some land owners along the route were demanding too high a compensation for the road to be built within their properties. However, during 1928 the budget was reduced significantly and then, in February 1929, the central government suddenly issued a decree ordering the suspension of the works claiming fiscal constraints.[8]

Almost four years later, in December 1932, the road was abandoned and had not advanced an inch beyond the five kilometres built by Bucheli.[9] A year earlier -through the Law 88 of 1931- the road had been incorporated to the national road network and its extension to Puerto Asís ordered, but this legal measure had remained on paper. The conflict with Peru broke out in September 1932, once again exposing the vulnerable condition of the country's frontier regions. The Pasto-Puerto Asís road was the only land access route to the Putumayo River, yet its precarious state constituted an obstacle even for the movement of infantry troops. Thus, and in the rush of war, a series of last minute decrees were passed to

[6] "Decreto 1652, Septiembre 30, 1926. Por el cual se organizan los trabajos de trazado y construcción de la carretera de Pasto a La Cocha", "Decreto 1245, July 29, 1927", AGN, MOP, T.1406, fols.41, 167; Jeremías Bucheli to Minister of Public Works, 8 May 1928, AGN, MOP, T.1406, fols.373-375.
[7] "Informe de los trabajos verificados en la carretera nacional Pasto-La Cocha", 8 Aug. 1928, AGN, MOP, T.1406, fols.419-421v.
[8] MOP, T.1406, fol. 606.
[9] Rafael Agudelo to Minister of Public Works, 11 Dec. 1932, AGN, MOP, Vol.3273, fol.199.

overcome this critical situation. One of them commanded to "establish immediately the construction, maintenance and improvement of those roads that, in respect of the government, are necessary to adequately meet the protection of the national frontier in the south of the country".[10] Another, issued a few days later, catalogued the Pasto-Puerto Asís road as of highest priority and ordered its immediate repair.[11]

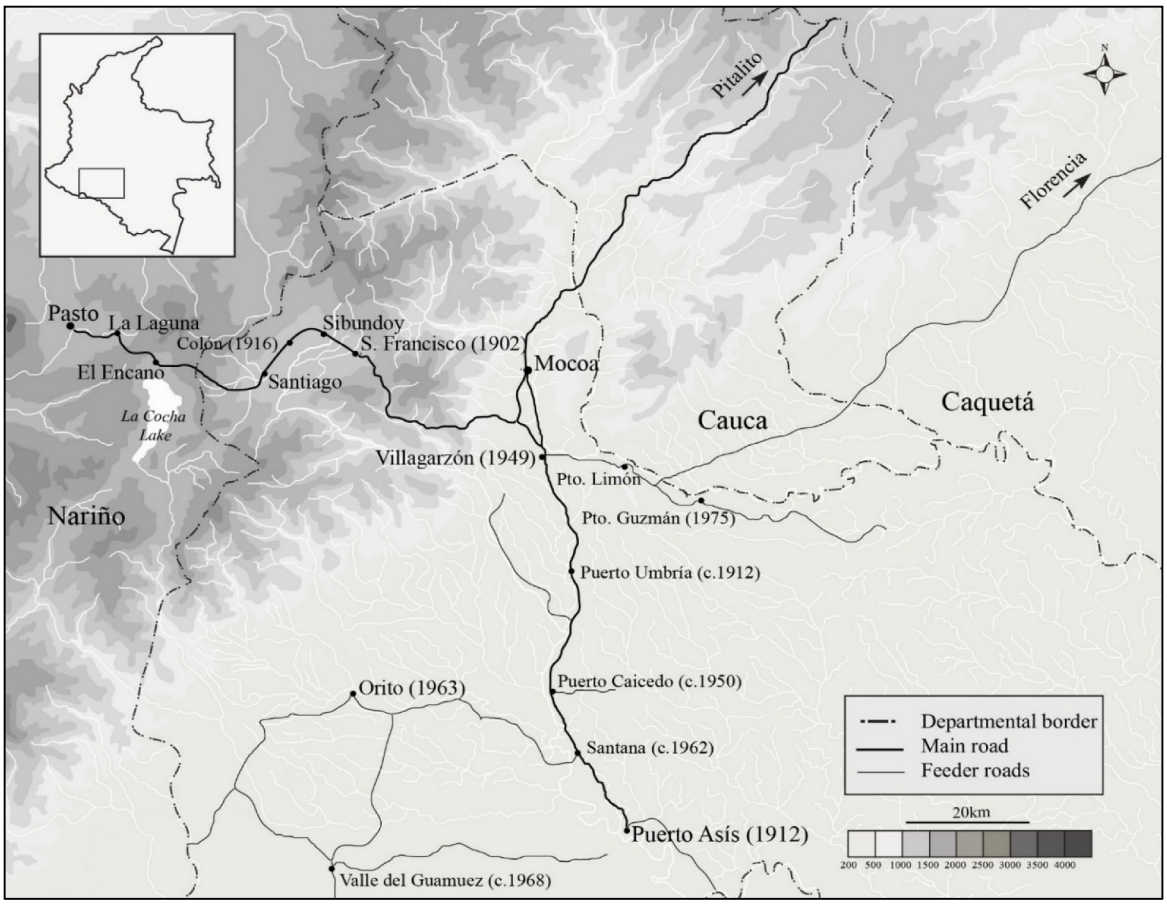
Three months later, on 11th December 1932, Rafael Agudelo, the engineer in charge of the first road section (Pasto to Puerto Umbría) reported that the entire 160 kilometres of road had been totally repaired. However, in the same report, he insisted to the Minister that keeping the existing road would be useless and asked him to consider its total upgrade. A new gravel road, noted the enthusiastic engineer, would guarantee not only the country's territorial sovereignty but "a true extension of the national territory and an immeasurable increase of the public wealth".[12] The answer came quickly. On December 21, Agudelo got a letter informing him that "for reasons of economy", his position would have to be terminated and the section under his charge re-allocated between the engineer responsible for the last section of the road (Puerto Umbría to Puerto Asís) and the Pasto road zone engineer. As regards to his eager appeals for the carreteable –in another report he had gone as far as to assure the Minister that with 2,000 workers the whole road could be improved in four months-,[13] they were simply ignored.

The road had to wait three more years before the government finally hired a new engineer to resume the upgrading works, frozen since 1929. The new contract contemplated the upgrade of the road between the few kilometres built by Bucheli and the site of Urcusique -16 kilometres south from Mocoa- and divided the road in two sections.[14] The first one (Pasto-San Francisco) was completed within the agreed terms and put into service by the end of 1936. The latter was initiated that same year and was expected to be concluded in

[10] "Decreto 1549, 26 Sept. 1932. Por el cual se dispone la ejecución de algunos trabajos", AGN, MOP, Vol.3273, fols.1-3.
[11] "Decreto 1581, 28 Sept.1932. Por el cual se fija el plan de trabajo que debe adoptarse en algunas vías", AGN, MOP, Vol.0318, fols.8-11; AGN, MOP, Vol.3278, fol.36.
[12] Agudelo to Minister of Public Works, 11 Dec. 1932, AGN, MOP, Vol.3273, fols.199-214.
[13] Agudelo to Minister of Public Works, 1 Jan 1932, AGN, MOP, Vol.3545, fols.224-231.
[14] APPC, APCC, Missions Caquetá-Putumayo, Box 25, n.f.

nine months. Eight years later, and after countless conflicts, bureaucratic hurdles and pleas of colonos and missionaries, the road arrived at Mocoa. Yet it took another thirteen to reach its end point on the Putumayo River. Its arrival at Puerto Asís in November 1957 is remembered as being a major landmark in the town's history. A historical brochure published in 1961 and entitled "Puerto Asís ayer y hoy" (Puerto Asís yesterday and today) recalled the crowded mass and parade that took place on the occasion and described the joy of the people as "indescribable". The event -it added- "marked a new age of development and intensified considerably the colonisation along the road as well as its surroundings".[15]

Map 9. Towns along the *carreteable* Pasto-Puerto Asís and feeder roads



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[15] Fray Plácido, *Puerto Asís ayer y hoy: breves apuntes sobre su fundación y desarrollo, 1912-1962* (Sibundoy: n.a., 1961)

The construction years of the carreteable from Pasto to Puerto Asís coincide roughly with a shift in the government's transport policy from railroad to road construction that took place from the early 1930s. As a result, between 1930 and 1950 the country's road network more than tripled, passing from less than 6,000 kilometres to around 21,000. Nevertheless, and despite this significant growth, by the early 1950s Colombia had less than two kilometres of roads per 1,000 inhabitants, the lowest per capita road length in Latin America.[16] The quality of roads was also among the poorest of the region, with less than 5% of the total national road network paved –the equivalent of less than one kilometre per 1,000 inhabitants. The country's difficult topography, the government's financial limitations, the high maintenance costs and the prevalence of regional interests over national ones are some of the reasons adduced for this lag.[17] More striking, however, was the high concentration of the road network in the country's central provinces and its virtual absence in the frontier regions: of the total 18,500 kilometres of roads in 1945, only 613 kilometres –none of them paved- were located in the "Intendencias" and "Comisarías", the peripheral provinces which together comprised about three quarters of the country's area.[18] Beyond the obvious economic and demographic rationale underpinning this disparity, this pronounced 'road inequality' gap -a situation that remains largely evident today- cannot but remind us of the marginal condition of the frontier territories within the "imagined community" of the nation.

The scarcity and precariousness of frontier roads did not deter optimism in terms of their beneficial effects for the country. Heavily influenced by early frontier scholars such as Frederick Turner, Isaiah Bowman and Herbert Bolton, a generation of geographers saw these infrastructures traversing the steep Andean mountains and plunging into the vastness of the llanos and jungles as a powerful redemptive technology of poor man's quest for land and domination of wilderness. Raymond Crist, an American geographer who visited Colombia in the late 1940s under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution, deemed road development in frontier regions as a revolutionary change in the country's history. "Such

[16] Pachón and Ramírez, *La infraestructura,* 54-55.
[17] Pachón and Ramírez, *La infraestructura,* 66-76.
[18] Pachón and Ramírez, *La infraestructura,* 57.

roads" –commented the author in a book about frontier settlement experiences in South America- "with their jeeps, cars, and trucks, represent a kind of safety hatch for those who will and can leave the Middle Ages, either for the twentieth-century life in towns or cities or for the unpopulated stretches of the east".[19] Ernesto Guhl, Crist's research assistant during his travels in the country and a prominent figure in Colombian geography, devoted several pages of his classic work "Colombia: bosquejo de su geografía tropical" (Colombia: an outline of its tropical geography) to praise the economic and cultural changes brought by the boom of road construction. When referring to the advance of colonisation in the Amazon and Llanos frontiers, he listed the road along with the river and airfield as the three factors preventing such settlements becoming "a colony of exile".[20]

But the most fervent exaltation of frontier roads can be found in the work of another of Crist's disciples, Edmund Hegen's "Highways into the Upper Amazon Basin", a case study from the early 1960s of six "penetration roads" to the Amazon regions of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Pregnant with Ratzelian overtones, Hegen's book portrayed those roads as the pioneer settler's ultimate instrument for his everyday struggle of turning the inhospitable landscape of the jungle into a cultured "living space" or *Lebensraum*. A typical passage reads:

> In the Selva, man has only two choices. The first is to accept the rules of the forests, the rivers, and rains. This means small space, narrow resource base and isolation…The other choice is to confront the forest with man's supreme tool –the predetermined road, the lifeline of the cultural landscape. From this break in the front of the forest, man will wrest the space of the cultural landscape.[21]

This over-enthusiastic view of the frontier road, which Hegen tellingly illustrated through the Pasto-Puerto Asís "highway", could hardly be sustained today. Not only does this image scarcely match what most of those highways really were -"trochas" or narrow one way dirt roads- but the "frontier experience" in general, as previously discussed, was anything but idyllic and far from encouraged the egalitarian and democratic values which Turner claimed

[19] Crist and Nissly, *East,* iv; see also Crist and Guhl, "Pioneer"
[20] Guhl, *Colombia: bosquejo*, Vol.2, 130.
[21] Hegen, *Highways,* 111.

it promoted in the North American case.[22] Yet the significance of roads within the history of frontiers can hardly be over-emphasised. Although more precarious "escape valves" than "highways" or palimpsests smoothing the advance of "civilisation" over "nature", such roads actively supported and often shaped the historical and spatial patterns of colonisation and settlement, as well the different dynamics linked to them. This is in many ways the case of the Putumayo's twentieth century colonisation processes, for the most part distinguished by its spontaneous nature or the lack of any government's planned schemes or support. This situation was clearly stated as early as 1945 by the Colombian ethnologist Milciades Chaves, who concluded that colonisation in the Putumayo had primarily been "carried out by hunger, without any interest on the part of the State or official institutions". The colonisers -mostly impoverished and landless peasants from the province of Nariño and to a lesser extent from Cauca and Huila-, he added, "have so far been abandoned to their fate, though they constitute a productive force".[23] As for the indigenous peoples, their situation was according to Chaves the most distressing one, constantly displaced and violently dispossessed of their lands.

The bleak picture painted by Chaves in the early 1940s, as many later studies have repeatedly stressed, has remained largely unaltered in time.[24] In the late 1940s and 1950s, peasants fleeing the bloody partisan conflict –known as "La Violencia"- that spread over many of the country's rural areas migrated to Putumayo following the road to Puerto Asís. However, the bulk of the new settlers continued to be peasants hungry for land coming mostly from the neighbouring provinces or floating populations attracted by the booms or extractive cycles which together tell an important part of the region's contemporary history: timber since the 1950s, fur in the 1960s, oil during the 1960s and early 1970s, coca in the 1980s and 1990s and more recently, since the late 2000s, mining and again oil. Just from a demographic standpoint, the impact of such migrations is noteworthy. Between the 1950s and the 1990s, the four decades during which most of the mentioned cycles took place, the

[22] Turner, "The significance", 13-42.
[23] Chaves, "La colonización", 580.
[24] See, amongst others, Gómez, *Putumayo…*; Casas, *Evangelio y Colonización…*; Ariza et.al. *Atlas Cultural…*; Domínguez, "National expansion", 405-418; Ortiz, "Colonization", 204-230.

population of the Putumayo increased more than sevenfold, from 28,105 according to the 1951 census to 204,309 in 1993.[25]

The role the Pasto Puerto Asís road played in this process was vital. The colonisation and settlement patterns in the Putumayo have been tellingly described a "linear" or "linear disperse",[26] since they largely followed the course of the 220-kilometre dirt road and the banks of the Putumayo River and some its main tributaries (see map 9). The occupation of lands adjacent to the carreteable, a phenomenon that dates back to the time of the Capuchin road, has been explained in both economic and geographical terms. Economically, since only agricultural activities in those lands with easy access to transport routes could be considered profitable.[27] Geographically, since the strip of flat lands between the road and the cordillera to the west is relatively narrow, and the access to the road and the Putumayo river –which runs parallel from Puerto Umbría to Puerto Asís- from the east was difficult due to the lack of tributary rivers flowing in that direction.[28] Yet, as noted by Rolf Wesche, who extensively surveyed the region in the early 1960s, the significance of the road in the region's colonisation process was not confined to its geographic layout or tangible economic benefits. The road, together with the main rivers, he observed, "[constitute] a place of excursion, the route through which news travel, and the primary means of social contact". Whilst noting that 90% of the Putumayo's inhabitants lived at a maximum distance of one kilometre from those arteries, the German geographer stated that a distance of just one hundred metres from them "could represent the difference between taking active part of daily life or total isolation".[29]

[25] Ariza et.al*., Atlas Cultural*, 184. Since the late 1990s although the migration associated to the coca economy decreased significantly, the population of the Putumayo continued to grow at a relatively fast pace due mostly to the recent oil and mining boom. The last national census (2005) estimates the total population of the province in 310,132.
[26] Domínguez, *Amazonia Colombiana,* 260.
[27] Domínguez, *Amazonia Colombiana,* 260.
[28] Brücher, *La colonización,* 151-152.
[29] Wesche, *El Desarrollo,* 1-2.

Reyes' ghost

If one tries to imagine how the "frontier experience" might look like from the perspective of the "pioneer", Wesche's emphasis on the significance of the road can be easily appreciated. Roads are widely assumed as synonymous with mobility and access to markets, public services and jobs. Yet for the so called "colono", who had left behind his native land and adventured through those "penetration roads" in the hope of a better future or livelihood, these infrastructures, no matter how precarious they were, meant something more. Faced with the harsh everyday realities of frontier life –lack of government support, remoteness, confinement- the road for the coloniser meant a vital link, both physical and imaginary, with the world beyond the isolated the space of his farmland. The significance of this link, moreover, is further accentuated if we consider that the 220 km of dirt road from Pasto to Puerto Asís constituted for several decades the only land route connecting Putumayo with the rest of the country.

Lorry making the route between Mocoa and San Francisco, c. 1950 (Source: ADS)

Even today, half a century after Wesche visited the Putumayo, and despite the improvements in transport infrastructure, his remarks on the road remain in many ways

valid. And yet there is a story about this specific road, which makes it singular even among other frontier roads. This story began around 1932 with Rafael Agudelo, the same engineer contracted by the government to repair the Capuchin road at the time of the conflict with Peru. As mentioned earlier, Agudelo insistently asked the Minister of Public Works about the urgent need to upgrade the entire road, a work that, according to him, consisted mostly of widening the actual road. However, he strongly argued for the need to totally replace the San Francisco-Mocoa section, of which he pointed out a number of major limitations and technical faults: the road gradient was too steep, the large number of rivers and creeks along the way required the construction of several bridges and culverts, and a long stretch of the road went through a section of solid rock hence making its widening an onerous task. To make his point even clearer, he employed the terms "eyesore", "irrational", "anti-economic" and "truly indigenous trail" when referring to the Capuchins' most praised accomplishment.[30]

Agudelo's proposal, basically consisting of two new roads starting from the Sibundoy valley –one ending in Mocoa and the other in Puerto Umbría- was never considered. Nevertheless, his sustained attack on the San Francisco-Mocoa section seems to have predicted its end. In 1936, when the upgrade works were finally contracted, the decision was to avoid the current bridle path and to build a new road following a different route. The construction of this road proved as turbulent and chaotic as that of its ancestor. The archive's documents shed light on the usual messiness of bureaucracy and everyday troubles.[31] Putumayenses, meanwhile, bring memories of lines of workers hung from ropes carving the road path through the precipitous cordillera and strong echoes of thunderous explosions. However, the real calamity of the new road seems to have been not a "tragedy repeated as farce" but a farce turned into tragedy. The verdict in 1942 by the engineer in charge of the works –the first one had long since resigned- does not require much clarification: "The conditions of this section, especially regarding to road width, curvature and drainage works" –he emphasised in a detailed report- "constitute a threat to the lives of those travelling

[30] Agudelo to Minister of Public Works, 11 Dec. 1932, AGN, MOP, Vol.3273, fols.199-214.
[31] See, for instance, AGN, MOP, Vol.066, fols.612-621; Vol.1065, fols.250-251; Vol.1160, fols.137, 153, 162-169, 454, 578v; Vol. 4946, fols.495-498.

there…Commercially and even for national defence purposes, a case in which a solid and safe road is required, this sector will be useless".[32] Neither does the answer from Bogotá a month later: "the works, above all" –reads a fragment of the short letter from the National Office of Roads and Railroads--, "must be aimed at connecting the sections currently isolated and providing a medium traffic while a definitive solution to this problem is sought".[33]

Decades of tragic accidents, landslides, complaints, pleas, unfulfilled promises, strikes and funereal names with which this infamous road section has been baptised –"road to hell", "wages of fear", "the longest cemetery in the world", "the dumb death"- and of which the "trampoline of death" remains the most popular one, bear witness to the nefarious effects of ignoring the engineer's warning. Still, the biggest irony of this episode is perhaps that after several years of numerous technical studies it was eventually concluded that the best possible "definitive solution" would be to build a new road which will roughly follow the same route chosen by the Capuchin missionaries around 1910 (see chapter 5).

[32] "Informe sobre la carretera Pasto-Puerto Asís", 3 May 1942, AGN, MOP, Vol.1160, fols.162-168.
[33] Leal to Baez, 3 June 1942, AGN, MOP, Vol.1160, fol.169.

Overturn of Miguel Ponce's truck, site "El Maquinista", 1946 (Source: GT)

Why the route of the "Trampoline" was chosen in the first place is however less clear. As early as 1939, an enraged citizen from Mocoa wrote directly to the President protesting not only about the road's absurd layout but the fact that it avoided the capital of the province. In response he got a cold note from the President's Secretary reprimanding him for the "inappropriate tone" of his letter and pointing out that the current project was the result of "long and meditated analyses". The road, he stated, had not followed the Capuchin route "for the simple reason that [this route] required the construction of 20 long bridges over the numerous rivers which water that region". [34] However, as if the damage could be easily repaired, he noted that a branch road connecting Mocoa with the main way was contemplated.

Although this branch road was eventually built, even today, more than 60 years later, old Mocoanos still regard this event as a deep affront from which the town could never totally recover. For them, moreover, the "true" reason why the road did not pass through Mocoa

[34] Lleras Pizarro to López, No. 990, nf, 6 May 1939 (Franco Romo, Personal Archive)

lies elsewhere and dates back to the time of Rafael Reyes. Supposedly -or so the story goes- a relative of one of the engineers hired to build this section was among the political prisoners exiled to Mocoa by Reyes (see chapter 1), and for this very reason he had decided to take revenge on this town by choosing the route of the Trampoline.

During the time I spent in Putumayo, I was told this story several times, although the name of the engineer and his relative prisoner often varied from one version to another. Neither was this the only thesis I heard about the origins of the Trampoline (another I came across a couple of times argued that the road had been strategically designed to repel the eventual advance of the Peruvian army beyond Mocoa). Yet, whether these stories are factual or not is not the point here. What is interesting about them is how through them people make sense of an event –the road- that is vital to make claims not only about the past but their present and future. It is to this subject that I now turn, in the hope of shedding some light on how frontier peoples imagine and locate themselves –spatially, historically, and morally- in relation to the state.

Jesús[35]

Some 20 kilometres west of Mocoa, as it leaves behind the rural settlement of Las Mesas and gradually plunges into the sharp folds of the *Cordillera*, the road becomes narrower and much steeper. The transition is acutely felt from the cabin of Jesús' truck, a 1973 Ford F600 he has owned for more than 20 years. As it battles through the ascending hairpin curves or "Lupas" –as this section of the road is suggestively known- the engine's rhythm turns into a hoarse symphony composed of the ceaseless strained shifts of the gearbox: low range first gear, high range first gear, low range second gear, shift down again to high first and so on. This monotony is only broken by the sporadic approach of another vehicle coming down the road, case in which the smaller vehicles yield to larger ones and must patiently wait for the other to pass wherever they can. This tacit "size law" of the road –single-lane for the most part- is not always followed and often leads to disputes and quarrels lasting until one

[35] Pseudonym requested.

of the drivers reluctantly gives up and goes into the hazardous task of driving his vehicle backwards.

Las Lupas (2010)

I recount to Jesús my personal experience months before while travelling from Sibundoy to Mocoa in a "mass grave" –as buses making this route are infamously known- when we spent about half an hour face to face with a lorry whose driver refused to move despite the angry plea from our fellow passengers. Jesús, however, who tirelessly defends truck drivers as the main victims of the Trampoline, seems to absolve his colleague of any guilt in the dispute and instead evokes a time, back in the 1990s, when "traquetos" (drug traffickers) driving their brand new 4x4s often pointed their guns at them to make clear who had the right of way. His story is followed by a talk on the misfortunes of his profession that goes on for a while until he makes a sudden stop in front of a small shrine on the side of the road. The stop is short but long enough for Jesús to light up a candle and take a piss while Chepe, his long time assistant, makes a quick check of the truck's wheels and brakes.

The shrine, housing the "Virgen del Carmen" -patron saint of drivers-, constitutes a ritual spot for road users, who regularly stop by and offer a prayer or a candle in exchange for a safe trip or as a way of paying tribute to those who have lost their lives in the road. Along with the other saints found along the road –there are at least five between Mocoa and San Francisco- this one has its own story. It was originally located next to the bridge over the Pepino River -15 kilometres down the road-, but removed in 1977 after miraculously surviving a legendary flood that swept the bridge away. Initially relocated a few kilometres up the road, a few years ago it was vandalised –Jesús' suspicions fall on a "satanic or evangelic sect"-, so it was replaced anew and caged into a solid fenced chapel on Km 121, where it remains to this day.

The *Virgen del Carmen* shrine, Km 121 (2010)

Just a few hundred metres from the "Virgen" lies a small altar commemorating one of the largest accidents of recent times, on July 22 2008, when a bus from Cootransmayo–Putumayo's main bus company- rolled off a 100 metre cliff leaving 23 people dead. This tragic event bears a special significance, as it happened two months after President Uribe

had publicly refused to support the construction of a bypass road to replace the Trampoline. The caricature below, drawn by a local cartoonist, sarcastically depicts the popular resentment Uribe's refusal aroused following of the tragedy.

Sirs:
President
Minister of Transport
Minister of Environment

I inform you that July's harvest was very good: 23 for me and 22 for the hospitals.

I would like to ask for ratification of the Sibundoy agreement and to be granted exclusive operating rights in this cordillera…

Your dear friend,
Angostura Trampoline

"Mission accomplished". July 27, 2008.[36]

***

As we resume the slow march across the Lupas, Chepe, a taciturn man of few words except when it comes to road tragedies, brings up some of the lurid details of the Cootransmayo accident and evokes others signalled by the crosses and memorial plaques scattered along the way. There are many memorials and they come in different shapes, colours, sizes and ages. Some look fresh and cared for while others are visibly eroded by the passage of time. Many, says Chepe, have been swept away by landslides or run over by lorries and buses.

[36] "Misión Cumplida", *Mi Putumayo*, July 21, 1991, accessed November 6, 2010, http://miputumayo.com.co/category/secciones/cronicas-y-opinion/lucho/el-rincon/

"This road has too many deaths" he says while recalling one of its many names: "The longest cemetery in the world". And as many as there are unnatural deaths, there are stories of apparitions and ghostly characters inhabiting the road: "El Gritón" (the screamer) on Km 110 and 112, "the ghost car" between Km 115 and 125 and 102-103, "the elf" around Fear Creek (Km 123), "the Indian" on Km 95, and others.

Jesús and Chepe's vivid descriptions of the Trampoline's intricate landscape of the dead cannot but evoke the road's tortuous geography daily faced by its living users: ceaseless serpentine curves, debris from past accidents, long stretches covered by dense fog, lines of vehicles patiently waiting for bulldozers to remove fresh landslides. This nightmare "roadscape" has been the subject of numerous terminal diagnoses ever since the time of its construction. In 1942, for instance, one of the road engineers noted that the Lupas section –one of the road's most critical parts- required "a separate chapter" and gloomily observed that the "forced" layout was "inexplicable in every sense", the specifications "couldn't be worse", and the drainage problems were "fairly serious". Nevertheless, he concluded that since the works on this section were too advanced, the only choice was to keep the existing route.[37] Almost 30 years later, a report on the road's landslides stated that in this same section: "the use of explosives in its construction, the large masses of fractured rocks, the abundant vegetation, the violent nature of the region's winter, and the construction in loops, do not allow any measures to avoid landslides".[38] The picture attached to the report (below) looks as desolate as its dismal verdict.

[37] "Informe sobre la carretera Pasto-Puerto Asís", 3 May 1942, AGN, MOP, Vol.1160, fols.162-168.
[38] "Datos sobre deslizamientos, derrumbes y erosionas en las carreteras", 17 Nov 1969, AGN, MOP, Box 6, folder 35, n.f.

Landslides across the *Lupas,* 1969 (Source: AGN, MOP, Box 6, folder 35, n.f.).

These textual and graphical descriptions of the road contrast with the official version of accidents on the road. Shortly before travelling with Jesús, I had spent some days at the INVIAS of Mocoa reviewing the thick and dusty folders containing the historical records of vehicle accidents.[39] Although records are only kept for the last decade –older records had been lost for years and no one at INVIAS seemed to have a clue about this loss- the 121 accidents reported during that period along the 65 kilometres of the Trampoline[40] constitute a "representative sample" to get an idea of how accidents are reported by the INVIAS officers. The most prevailing "possible causes" of accidents are listed under the following set categories: "ineptitude in driving" (22 cases), "driver's recklessness" (14), "driver's drunkenness" (13), "speeding" (13), "sleeping" (9), "fog, rain, smoke" (9), "steering or mechanical fails" (8), or different combinations of the above. A few are attributed to

[39] "Estadísticas de accidentalidad carretera Pasto-Puerto Asís", Oficina seccional INVIAS Mocoa, Putumayo. Note: The INVIAS' data and quotes on road accidents presented in this section comes from a paper file that is not paginated.

[40] The Paso-Mocoa is 148 km long, but the section known as the Trampoline extends from San Francisco (km 73) to Pepino (km 138).

road-related issues such as “lack of visibility” (7), “landslides” (5), “road damages” (3), and “wet surface” (1), while only one is exclusively blamed on the “geometry of the road” and contains the following observation: “highly dangerous section for different reasons: abrupt terrain, single-lane road, construction of bypass road urged”.

More detailed and imaginative descriptions can be found under the section on “observations”, such as this one from a truck at Km 78: “The cause of the accident was that the [truck] gearbox slipped into neutral, crashing head-on with another truck; then it moves backwards 33 metres at great speed, turns sharply and falls off the cliff some 150 metres. Before falling, the driver’s assistant jumps off the truck saving himself from perishing”. The accident is listed under the category “imprudent reverse”. Another at Km 116, classified under “ineptitude in driving”, reads: “When approaching the curve the driver pulls over too much to make way for a bus coming in the opposite direction and gets off the track leaving a few seconds for the driver and his two companions to jump off the vehicle before it collapses”. And there are many more where, despite obvious contradictions, agency is variously attributed to human ineptitude, faulty gearboxes, brakes and steering wheels but very rarely to the road itself, whose “inexplicable” geometry and “fairly serious” problems appear to have become just another ‘natural accident’ within the landscape. Amid this normalised geography of official discourse there is a subverted road warning sign at Km 95 (picture below) that ironically reminds the traveller of the pervasive presence of the road’s other, moral geography. In the original sign (“Danger: zone of landslides”) a letter E has been relocated so it now reads: “Danger: zone of [falling down]”

"**Peligro. Zona d derrúmbese"**. San Francisco-Mocoa road, Km 95 (2010)

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Jesús, clinging to the steering wheel of his truck and skilfully negotiating the tortuous Lupas, looks much less concerned with the dead than the living. After all, he is a long time survivor of the road. He started in 1965 as trucker's assistant and became a "patented driver" (holding a driving license) in 1968. Ever since, he proudly declares, "if I haven't been in the shop I've been on the road". For the most part, he has covered the route from Puerto Asís and Guamuez to Pasto transporting all kinds of goods back and forth, from timber and livestock to construction materials, veterinary drugs, animal feed, gasoline, grain and all kinds of agricultural products. He has travelled the Trampoline a couple thousands of times –between one to three times a week depending on demand-, both during the day and at nights. He has lost a good number of friends to the road –he estimates between 60 and 70-, while many others have long since retired or have "died naturally", and according to him only a few from the 'old generation' remain in the business. He has on numerous occasions escaped death, and yet watching his careful and skilled driving one could hardly conceive that these near-misses were due to "ineptitude" or "recklessness". He acknowledges that

in the past alcohol used to be a common issue among truckers and bus drivers, although he argues that there was a time when the road was so hazardous –he says the road nowadays "looks like a highway" when compared with the past- that sometimes a "drink of *aguardiente*" was essential to gather the nerve to drive certain stretches.

After all those years on the Trampoline, Jesús' knowledge of the road has become corporeal: he recognises and feels every pothole, every alteration of the road surface -no matter how imperceptible-, every deficiency on its routine maintenance. And he resents it all. He insistently asks me to take note of every flaw he points out and to take them to "some politician" in Bogotá while complaining about his numerous pending or unanswered claims to INVIAS. Yet his indignation is not restricted to the neglect of the road and he enumerates five other "factors" that have historically affected his profession: the police, the army, the guerrilla, the paramilitary, and the robbers. These elements together comprise another geography, one that is highly dynamic and changing in time and space, although it has its own landmarks and "hot spots": Los Guayabos" (Km 129), "Curva del Km 126", "Curva de los atracos" (Km 90) and "Chorlaví" (Km 74), are famed for robberies; "Curva de Ignacio" (Km.128, named after Ignacio Pantoja, a truck driver assassinated there); "Curva del Zambi" (Km.123), guerrilla checkpoints back in the 1990s and early 2000s, and so forth.

Jesús and Chepe have been victims of muggings several times, although they recall the 1990s as the worst decade. Between 1995 and 2000, civil unrest spread across the region as a response to the government's coca eradication policies, a crop that at the time represented the main livelihood for a large part of the rural population. The conflict between "cocaleros" (coca growers), guerrillas and government brought to the surface "structural" problems of the region –among which the lack of roads figured prominently- and involved numerous strikes and mobilisations. The FARC[41] set up road blocks and often banned the traffic of vehicles under the threat of burning them. When allowed through, road users were regularly charged expensive tolls, sometimes at various points on the road.

[41] The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) is the largest guerrilla group in Colombia.

According to Jesús, the fee between Puerto Asís and Pasto could oscillate between 80 and 200 thousand pesos (40 and 100 US dollars) depending on the load value and number of tolls. In the times when both the guerrilla and the army were absent, the road turned into a "lawless territory" and assaults on the road were everyday events. Jesús and Chepe recall an occasion when they were assaulted seven times in just one day. On the last occasion, approaching San Francisco around 9 PM, they were stripped of the last six thousand pesos they had left for dinner. On another occasion, not long ago, tells Jesús, he got stabbed for resisting an assault.

Jesús behind the wheel of his truck (2010)

Even today, and despite the increasing presence of police and army on the road, waves of robbery are frequent. Yet on the Trampoline even the perpetrators sometimes become victims. The INVIAS' records contain the following report of an assault on Km 116: "The truck was heading from Mocoa to Pasto. According to the driver, two assailants, hooded, waylaid him and asked for his money. One of them tried to drive the truck but instead of

driving forward drove in reverse rolling off the cliff". The incident was classified as "ineptitude in driving; attempted assault with a deadly weapon".

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Six kilometres ahead of the Virgen and nearly 400 metres above is the police checkpoint of "El Mirador" (The Viewpoint), another 'rite of passage' of the road, noticeable from a distance by its towering telephone antennas and a tall statue of a Christ looking compassionately towards the Putumayo lowlands. The magnificent view of the Putumayo foothills and lowlands offer a stark contrast with the bleak landscape of the place: an old trench covered with wet camouflaged clothes, a long cement barrack, an improvised radio office, the remaining ruins from an old station shattered by guerrillas back in the 1990s, and two small "casetas" or shops where travellers gather and wait for the routine police checks.

Jesús can't hide his disgust when having to confront the questions coming from outside the driver's window: "Where are you coming from? Where are you heading? What kind of load are you carrying? Are you carrying any weapon sir? Can I see your IDs and the vehicle's paperwork please?"

Once the impassive officer takes the documents and walks away, we join a group of bus passengers crowded in one of the casetas and order coffee while Chepe makes another routine check of the truck. From there we can listen to the repeated customary verification procedure taking place in the adjacent building: "This is Alfa 3 over. Received Alfa 3.To verify a subject over. Roger Alfa 3. ID 8-0-4-0-7-7-4-2 over. Copied Alfa 1. (30 seconds). This is Alfa 1 over. Roger Alfa 1. Subject clean over. Roger Alfa 1 over and out". Five minutes later the same officer returns with the documents and indifferently hands them over to Jesús with the words "you are free to go".

El Mirador (2010)

It takes Jesús' truck a good 20 minutes to overcome the last two kilometres of the Lupas and reach "Filo de Hambre" (Edge of Hunger), an abandoned road station at Km 113 that now serves as temporary lodging for army soldiers patrolling the area. From there and for the next 20 kilometres the road becomes flatter, relaxing the truck's engine and thus attenuating the cabin's vibration. Jesús, still upset for the ten minutes we lost at *El Mirador*, begins a long monologue about his old distrust and revulsion towards the army and the police. "We are told the police is our best friend but it's our worst enemy. They seem to forget transport brings life to the region" he states while complaining about the frequent mistreatment he and his colleagues have to endure daily: lengthy checks, sometimes various times a day, excessive tickets and constant requests for bribes. Yet what Jesús resents most is that despite being one of the oldest and most frequent users of the road he is treated invariably as an "unknown". This he considers a personal affront.

His relationship with the army is more complex. Although he acknowledges things have improved slightly over time (soldiers are now encouraged to greet travellers with a thumbs up sign), he thinks that until recent years they were the most serious threat on the road. He

especially recalls the late 1970s and the 1980s, a period when the guerrilla began to spread across the region and civilians ended up being trapped in the conflict with the army. Lorry drivers, constantly moving around the territory, were frequent victims of harsh interrogations and inspections. "Those were awful inspections, we were ordered to take our shoes and pants off even when it was raining" recalls Jesús, while Chepe comments by way of clarification that "at that time human rights didn't even exist here". This humiliating situation, however, led to the most remarkable experience in Jesús' career. In the midst of the constant abuses by the military, he, along with most of his colleagues –Jesús estimates they were about a hundred- joined the M-19, a guerrilla movement that came to have significant political and military influence in the region in the 1970s and 80s. Their role was mostly to provide information about military activity in the area but sometimes also included transporting firearms and other goods. In exchange, apart from training courses on guerrilla tactics and political indoctrination, Jesús proudly affirms, "we got what we had historically been denied by the state: respect and value for our work".

Although the M-19 demobilised in the late 1980s,[42] it left a deep mark on Jesús. He refers to this experience as a "university" for those who, like him, "were too weak to fight a heavily armed government". Ever since his experiences with the M-19, he has aligned with leftist political parties and proudly defines himself as a "fighter" and "watchman" of the road, gathering signatures, grievances, and denunciations from friends and colleagues. Yet he regards the nature of his job as the main obstacle to political action. "We are a very disunited family" he says, pointing to the fact that he and his colleagues spend most of the time on the job and it is very difficult to meet beyond the brief encounters on the road. Besides, he argues, for independent drivers like him, making a living is so hard at present that they can hardly stop working. And as if this needed proof, Jesús cites by memory the poor earnings of an ordinary working day: the average freight of a trip from Mocoa to Pasto he estimates at around $600,000 pesos (10 tons at $60,000 each). From this amount he subtracts the unloading fee ($80,000), fuel ($230,000), accommodation and food for two

[42] For an account of the political evolution of the M-19 movement in the Putumayo see Ramírez et.al., *Elecciones, coca,* 62-64.

($100,000), and Chepe's wage of $40,000. Left with about $150,000 (US$80), Jesús still has other costs such as taxes, insurance, union fees, and maintenance of the truck: a tyre, for example, costs $1'200,000 and Jesús' truck has 6; the average life of a tyre is about nine months but on the Trampoline they burst more frequently. To make things worse, since the times of the coca boom, the Putumayo has lost much of its agricultural output, meaning that today his truck goes mostly empty on its journey to Pasto.

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We have been on the road for four hours and travelled nearly 50 kilometres when we pass through the sector of "Murallas" (Walls), famous for the single worst tragedy in the history of the Trampoline. On the side of the road there is a small memorial shrine crowded with crosses and commemorative plaques, while others can be found fixed in the long stone wall along the road. All are inscribed with the fateful date of July 19th 1991, when a huge landslide buried several vehicles killing dozens of people (there is no official number but estimates vary from 60 to more than one hundred), many of whom were never recovered. A long stretch of the road was swept away, leaving most of the Putumayo isolated for several weeks. A press note from "El Tiempo", the country's largest newspaper, reported the event adding the following historical overview of the road: "the entire road to the Putumayo is horrifying. The drivers that cross it daily call it the road of death. It was built during the conflict with Peru, way back in 1933. It looks more like a trocha. Moreover, travellers are constantly threatened by the guerrilla".[43]

[43] "Tragedia en Putumayo: las víctimas podrían pasar de 50", *El Tiempo*, July 21, 1991, accessed November 5, 2010, http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-123694

Murallas (2010)

As we leave behind this fateful place and begin the last ascent of "Portachuelo" – the mountain ridge that separates Mocoa from the Sibundoy valley-, Chepe evokes some of the gory details of the tragedy: dismembered corpses and limbs covered in mud and scattered all over the place, bodies washed away by the avalanche and found days later kilometres away, bodies found intact but asphyxiated inside their vehicles, improvised mass graves to bury the "NNs" (unknown or unclaimed). Jesús, less graphic in detail, mentions that he lost more than ten colleagues in the tragedy. He also says he doesn't like to stop there -he thinks the place is "too heavy"- but for a time now every time he passes by he thinks it's about time to retire from the job. At 66, he feels he has become "nervous" and too tired of fighting with the INVIAS, the police, and the road.

I ask him if with the "Variante" (the future bypass road from San Francisco to Mocoa) he might think about remaining in the business. "The Variante is a great thing for Putumayo, but then even the "cocineras" (female cooks) from Mocoa's market will be able to drive a truck" he says, explaining how a "modern" road will inevitably lead to the devaluation of

his “know-how”, for better or worse linked to the Trampoline. So his life as a truck driver, he believes, will be over with the demise of the old road.

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Along with Jesús, there are others for whom the long awaited replacement of the Trampoline is a point of concern. “Malacate” (Km 110), a colonist from San Francisco who used to make a living by rescuing cars –a role that is now less common since, as he explains: “the road is wider, the people drink less and the trucks are now insured”- claims the government projects offered to the few inhabitants of the road are useless: “with the new road not even the birds will visit us here, so what the hell am I supposed to do with a trout pond here?”, he asks indignantly. His plan, he says, is to sue the government to get compensation for the land plot he owns and use the money to set up a business in his hometown. María Cárdenas, restaurant owner (Km 106), is sceptical about the plan to turn the Trampoline into a tourist attraction. “If the government is not able to maintain the road as it is now”, she asks, “how is it going to do it in the future? We are going to be abandoned here, die of hunger”. Laureano Cusi (Km 129), a road maintenance worker for 24 years, fears for his pension: he is 47 and still has 13 years to reach the retirement age; yet, he is pessimistic about the Variante and doubts it will be ready before his time arrives.

Jesús is sceptical about the future road too, whose slow progress he attributes to the opposition to the project on the part of the indigenous communities. “All they want is money from the government” he says visibly irritated, and then goes on with an explanation I had recurrently heard amongst non-indigenous Putumayenses and which mirrored the pervasive nature of the state’s old civilisation rhetoric: “Because they are not productive people, they are lazy and want the government to feed them, to provide them with health, with subsidies, all that. And they have to thank the government and the whites for what they have been given, education and all, otherwise they would still continue to be savages”.

Since this issue seems beyond dispute for Jesús, I change topic and ask him what his plans are for retirement after almost five decades on the road. He talks about buying a piece of

land near Mocoa to set up a small agricultural farm, an unfulfilled dream from his youth, and conjectures at length about the potential crops and the profits he could make on them. Yet, as if waking up from the dream, he says that after so many years on the road he finds it hard to imagine himself "anchored". Thus, he will maybe replace his old Ford for a dump truck when his truck driver license expires a few years from now, when he becomes 70; or perhaps he will buy a taxi to carry passengers along the new road from Mocoa to San Francisco; or who knows.

As Jesús continues speculating about his future plans we suddenly come across a police checkpoint on km 75, just when we are about to conclude our journey through the Trampoline. This time he is asked to step off the truck and take the vehicle documents with him. From the truck's cabin we can't hear his conversation with the officer, but from its high tone we can suspect something is going wrong. After five long minutes Jesús is back and without a word starts the engine and drives off.

"So?" asks Chepe eventually. "The door's registration seal" answers Jesús with a tired expression and explains to me that it was recently removed when he sent the truck to be painted. "And how much?" replies Chepe. "Fifty thousand", comes the reply.

Franco

I first knew about Franco in February 2010, a few months before starting fieldwork. Reading an online opinion column from a local newspaper, I came across a comment with the title (in caps) "DO NOT MAKE POLITICS WITH THE PUTUMAYO ROADS" and signed "Franco Romo Lucero: Overseer Pasto-Mocoa road". The comment, longer than the article itself, was directed against Orlando Guerra, a congressman and candidate from the Putumayo to the National Parliament, whose re-election campaign motto was "the parliamentarian of the roads for development". Franco emphatically (and ardently) accused Guerra of claiming the progress on road development in the region –specifically the recently approved project to build bypass road aimed at replacing the Trampoline- as result of his personal influence. "In my 35 years working as an agricultural engineer in the Putumayo" –said the commentary- "I never heard that Dr. Guerra had participated in any meeting, committee, forum, debate,

etc. concerning the Putumayo roads". Thus, he demanded Guerra to "respect" the enduring popular struggle for "decent" roads, which he vindicated in the following terms: "Since 1955, it was the leaders from Mocoa, together with 45 leaders and 23 ex-mayors from the towns of Santiago, Colón, Sibundoy and San Francisco, the ones that joined together and began to advocate for better roads in the Putumayo".[44]

Franco's aversion towards Guerra's campaign, as I would later learn in Putumayo, was shared by many. Every time I brought up the question of his campaign (unsuccessful this time) I heard the words "unfair", "abusive" and "unjust" to describe the politician's self-proclaimed role in the promotion of roads. Those responses, moreover, revealed how sensitive the issue of roads is in the region and in particular within the local history of popular struggle. This struggle -like Jesús' "political topography" of the Trampoline- has a manifest moral content, in this case inexorably connected to the ways in which people invoke the past to make claims about the present and future. Put another way, history appears here, as notes Rappaport, as "a question of power in the present, and not of detached reflection upon the past. It can serve to maintain power, or can become a vehicle of empowerment".[45] It was precisely by appreciating this political value of history in the struggle for roads, that I would eventually learn why a character like Franco Romo is so familiar in the Putumayo.

Franco is native of Colón, where his parents, peasants from Nariño, as most of the town's early settlers, arrived in the 1930s. At 73, he has had a long and varied career that includes being a school teacher, Secretary of Planning, Development and Agriculture of the Putumayo, as well as leadership positions in numerous civic and community organisations (posts that, he emphasises, he achieved "thanks to personal merit and not to any political blessing"). During the last three decades, however, he has been involved in the struggles around the Pasto-Mocoa road, organising various pro-roads committees, debating on the radio, promoting strikes, sending complaints to politicians in Putumayo, Nariño and Bogotá,

[44] "No hagamos protagonismo politiquero con las vías del Putumayo", accessed February 8, 2010, http://es.groups.yahoo.com/group/socivilputumayo/message/2087

[45] Joanne Rappaport, *The politics of memory. Native historical interpretation in the Colombian Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 16.

writing in the local press and, more recently, engaging in intense debates on internet forums.

During fieldwork, Franco soon became a point of reference in many conversations I had about the past and present history of the road. He was often referred to me as someone "que ha peleado mucho por las vías" (an enduring fighter for roads) and a very knowledgeable person of the history of struggle. Following a few e-mails and phone conversations, I eventually travelled to Pasto - where Franco currently lives- to meet him in person. We spent a morning at his house, Franco giving me a long autobiographical history of the road, from his admiration for the Capuchins' tenacious campaigns for the Pasto-Puerto Asís road (of which he heard constantly during the years he attended primary school at the Mission' seminar of Sibundoy), to the "villainous" engineers responsible for the existence of the Trampoline (his father had been a food supplier during the construction of the road and had given him the names), to the worst tragedies (his brother lost a truck with its driver and two passengers in Murallas), to the early times of the popular struggle (which he joined from the 1970s), to the countless unfulfilled promises of a new road and in-vain lobby trips to Bogotá (where he was often reproached "for coming with the same old sermon"), and to his most recent quarrels with politicians.

I learnt that his latest dispute was not only regarding the Trampoline, but also around another section of the road (Santiago-El Encano) which the government had recently opted to pave, despite engineering studies recommending its replacement due to design problems and environmental impacts. Eager to show short-term results, Guerra and other local politicians had initiated a smear campaign against Franco, calling him "public enemy of roads" and "officially" declaring him a "persona non grata" in the Putumayo, to the point that for some time he was threatened with lynching if he showed up in Sibundoy. (Weeks later at Mocoa an INVIAS officer would tell me "off the record" that the ongoing resurfacing work was indeed a huge mistake, and during my trips with Jesús we saw some overturned trucks along that section, which he angrily blamed on the road layout).

Franco's account of this conflict allowed him to make a broader point about the historical lack of leadership and "short-sightedness" of most politicians from Nariño and Putumayo which -together with the "negligence of the state"-, he considered to be the main cause for the precarious and backward state of roads in the region. Yet this argument –which I heard repeated many times in Putumayo- allowed him to highlight again the long tradition of popular leaders and struggles, as well as his own legacy in this process. He jealously kept an archive of memos, letters and written complains dating from the late 1940s to the present, some of his authorship and others which he had gathered or inherited from past leaders. At the end of our meeting, I asked him for a copy of this archive, which he generously agreed on condition that it was photocopied at "un lugar de confianza" (a place he knew and trusted), and to which he personally escorted me.

Days later, examining Franco's archive, I realised why he treasured these documents so much. The archive was small, no more than 40 pages in total, yet together they comprised a comprehensive genealogy of the struggles for the road, relating different characters, landmark dates, laws, press articles and minutes of community meetings. Many were heavily marked, and I would later notice Franco habitually resorted to them in his own writings, often reproducing them *in extenso*, revealing the value of the past both as *testimony* and *factual evidence* supporting and "making sense" of present struggles. One of the documents, entitled "A faithful testimony of a fight for the social and economic demands of the Intendancy of the Putumayo", particularly struck me for both the perseverance of these frontier leaders and the central state's bureaucratic apathy and inertia. The three-page typescript document, authored by Isaías Rosero, another renowned leader from San Francisco, compiles several chronological responses to petitions about the replacement of the Trampoline sent by him to various public offices in Bogotá from 1963 to 1979. Some of them include:

> **No.1897. 20th December 1963**. Regarding construction road San Francisco-Mocoa. Road layout studies ready. Waiting to know national budget for next year to begin construction with allocated resources for such road. Sincerely, Castillo, chief engineer, Ministry of Public Works.

No.CP-858. 13th June 1967. Dear Sir: Regarding the petition you make in your letter, I inform you that a programme for the Popular Integration of the Putumayo is to be launched, and within that programme one of the projects which will be given priority is precisely the San Francisco-Mocoa road. Sincerely, Emilio Urrea Delgado, Presidential Counsellor.

No.28853. 10th July 1975. Dear Sir: I acknowledge receipt of your communication from 3rd July 1975, in which you make reference to your previous one of 30th September 1974. I gladly inform you that this Ministry, aware of that rich region of the Putumayo, has determined to give a prompt solution to the San Francisco-Mocoa road. Sincerely, Humberto Salcedo Collante, Minister of Public Works.

No.T:00415. 7th July 7 1977. Dear Sir: Regarding to your communication from 28th May, where you raise the need for the construction of an alternate road from San Francisco to Mocoa. In this respect I inform you that this Department shares your concern, and that within the current budgetary constraints your request will be taken into account in the elaboration of the 1978 budget. Sincerely, John Naranjo. Director, National Planning Department.

No. 008. 9th January 1979. Dear Don Isaías. I have read with interest your letter sent late last year, together with your article "An absurd and dangerous road" published in the newspaper El Putumayo, and your letters to the President, the Minister of Public Works, and the pamphlet in defence of the alternate road. All these documents represent a valuable and convincing defence for a solution to the actual road. I agree that the current road, especially after the tragedy of 6th November, constitutes a precarious solution and should be replaced…However, the solution that you mention, the alternate road San Francisco-Mocoa, of which 12 km were already built, had to be suspended due to topographic and geologic difficulties. Nature, having gifted the Putumayo with much of the country's best lands such as the Sibundoy and Guamués valleys, has also put formidable obstacles disconnecting Putumayenses. This is why we should study these projects patiently and imaginatively, to resolve obstacles in appearance insurmountable…The Ministry of Public Works has changed its politics substantially and demonstrated a great concern for the Putumayo. Kind regards, Gustavo Svenson Cervera, Director, Administrative Department for Commissaries and Intendancies.

Rosero's endless pleas never turned into more than vague promises of bureaucrats from Bogotá. However, they were later picked up and reproduced by Franco in his "Historical chronology of the organisation and struggle", a chapter of a book he published in 1990 entitled "Carreteras Variantes" (Alternate roads), an original copy of which he keeps in his archive.[46]

[46] Franco Romo, *Carreteras Variantes* (Pasto: n.a., 1990).

Carreteras Variantes, 1990

The back cover of the book (above) shows a sketch of Franco in a combative pose, wearing a sash with the title "Las Variantes" (the bypasses), alluding to the road sections between San Francisco and Mocoa and Santiago and El Encano, and surrounded by the slogans "we will fight" and "we will defeat". The illustration not only introduces the author but is highly suggestive of the book, largely a compendium of writings (historical, political, autobiographical) and documents (press articles, road proposals, legal complaints, public and private ads advocating for the road), aimed at both documenting the struggles and justifying the need to continue fighting (the "exclusive purpose" of the book, as stated by the author -then President of the Committee "Pro-variante San Francisco-Mocoa"- was to make a call to send a commission to Bogotá in order to "remind the President of his promise" and ask him for a budget for the road).

The entire image, on the other hand, showing Franco emerging from and dominating a map of the Sibundoy valley (traversed by the drainage works in which Franco proudly participated as engineer in the 1970s), also evokes another story: that of the twentieth century dramatic transformation of the Valley initiated by the Capuchin mission, and the hegemonic ideals it sought to implant and appear here embodied in the figure of the coloniser. The first chapter of the book ("The conquest of the Amazon through a road"), for instance, is an enthusiastic eulogy to the Capuchins' enduring fight for the Pasto-Puerto Asís road, which the author finds inspiring for the present and future struggles, thus commenting that: "Now, in 1989, we should fill ourselves with courage, follow their example and undertake a struggle leading us not to civilisation, but the development of our Amazon resources".[47] This aspect is of crucial importance, as it reveals how in the act of invoking the past to make sense of the present, some stories and characters are reified (the missionaries, the past colonist leaders and struggles for the road) while others (the Indigenous dispossession of land and labour associated with the road) are excluded from the picture or simply remain silent.

Despite those silences and erasures, to which we will return later, Franco's history exposes the road's moral geography, a geography that no inhabitant of the Putumayo can escape and which he consciously underscores to show the frontier's sense of neglect and abandonment. Although there are several parts of the book where this sense comes to the fore, I will refer two examples where it becomes especially clear. The first one concerns the burdensome experience of travelling across the Trampoline, which Franco accentuates by contrasting it with the journey along another road and describes in the following terms:

> Those who travel between Pasto and Mocoa have to pay $9,40 per km, bearing all the discomforts, shaking, frights and risks of being buried into the cliff; in comparison with the $5,71 per km paid by those travelling between Pasto and Cali in Pullman buses, five stars with TV and a stewardess on board. We know that the more comfortable and faster the trip is from one destination to another, the more expensive the ticket; which doesn't happen to us Nariñenses and Putumayenses for whom, the more gruelling, riskier and slower is the trip, the more we are charged. So, why is it this way? Who can explain us this

[47] Romo, *Carreteras Variantes*, 6.

> dilemma? Will we have to resign our children's fate to this bleak future? What do you think? Let us know.

The second has to do with the "martyrs" of the Trampoline during its "50 years of existence", which the author gathers from "fragmentary evidence". According to Franco, the road "has claimed more than 2,700 lives among workers, drivers and passengers, and left some 3,900 invalids, together with $5,700 million pesos losses in machinery, vehicles, merchandise and other goods that have been buried in the cliffs of that gloomy way".[48] The significance of these numbers, however, does not seem to lie in its magnitude or even accuracy (for no source is mentioned), but in how those victims represent, in Franco's words: "the weapon that, joined to the democratic struggle, lead us soon to the conquest of this long-awaited alternate road".[49]

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Twenty years after the publication of Franco's book, not one kilometre of the bypass from San Francisco to Mocoa had been built. During fieldwork, news and rumours sporadically announced the beginning of the works "next week" or "next month". And though some looked expectant and optimistic with every new rumour, many, especially the old, sounded sceptical and often assured the future road was one of those things they will never see come true. But Franco, despite the many decades of struggles and failed promises, looked far from defeated. At the time I met him, he had recently organised a "veeduría" (a citizen oversight committee) for the Variante project, and told me was preparing an upgraded version of his book. If things go as announced by the government, he thinks, he will be around 80 by the time the 45-kilometre new road is concluded.

Guillermo

Guillermo was born in 1938, into a family of colonists from Nariño who settled in Mocoa in the early 1900s and had prospered during the rubber boom. When he was around 14, his mother, portrayed by Guillermo as a driven and strong-minded woman, encouraged him to

[48] Romo, *Carreteras Variantes*, 20.
[49] Romo, *Carreteras Variantes*, 21.

continue his education outside the Putumayo, where schools were at the time controlled by the Capuchin Mission. Through the Bishop of Sibundoy, he got a scholarship for the Colegio Nacional de Cartago, a school in one of country's central provinces, some 700 kilometres from Mocoa. It was late September when the Bishop gave him the news in Sibundoy, and ordered him to turn up at his new school by the first week of October. He caught a truck to Mocoa, where his mother hurried to pack up his bag and asked his elder brother Víctor to accompany him on the long journey.

The longest and most torturous part of the trip was the road from Mocoa to Pasto. In those days, it was usually made on top of lorries packed with plantain, timber and other products from the region, and could take from 18 hours to several days depending on the usual contingencies such as road accidents, landslides or breakdowns. From Mocoa to San Francisco, where the entire road was single lane and rarely more than three metres wide, there were various "pida vía" stations (checkpoints connected by crank phones through which operators controlled the up and down traffic). Waiting times at each station could vary from a few minutes to several hours, depending both on the mentioned eventualities and the time of the day or the week.

Guillermo and Víctor travelled by night, when the traffic was usually light, and made it to Pasto safely and without any major delays. However, in Popayán, half way between Pasto and Cartago, they had to spend a few days, Víctor having to attend some personal business there. They reached their final destination in mid October, just to find, to their great dismay, that the students' registration dates were already closed. For a few minutes, Víctor begged the school's secretary to no avail. Then, when things seemed totally hopeless, Guillermo took the floor and gave what he describes as his "first public speech". Almost 60 years later, from the terrace of Junín, the farmhouse built by his father and which Guillermo inhabits today, he tells me the story as if it happened yesterday:

> I said to Miss Celina (the secretary): "how is it possible that I come from Mocoa, in the jungle, son of a colonist, and you reject me?"
> I remember there were three desks in the room and in the third one there was a man listening. At some point, he turned to her and said: "Celina, tell the boy to come here"
> And he said to me: "I am the National Inspector of Public Schools. Who sent you?"

–the Bishop of Putumayo
Then he looked at a map of Colombia hung on the wall and asked me: “Where is the Putumayo? How long did it take you to get from there to here?”
I pointed out Mocoa on the map and said: “10 days Sir” (I just said 10 days, without mentioning the delay at Popayán)
He hesitated for a moment but then turned again towards Miss Celina and said: “Miss, please register the boy at once”

Guillermo Guerrero. Junín (2010)

I first heard about Guillermo a few weeks after moving to Mocoa, through an engineer working at the local INVIAS office. Guillermo, he told me, had worked there as a field engineer for many years -until he retired in 2004-, and was a sort of “living archive”, to the point that he was occasionally asked for information regarding past contracts, road works, technical studies, and the like. However, I only came to understand this fully when I met him in person some days later.

I had briefly mentioned to him on the phone that I was interested in knowing about the history of the road and also an engineer’s point of view of the Trampoline. He addressed this last issue during our first meeting at Junín, in a two-hour photographic power-point kilometre by kilometre journey through the road. Through Guillermo, I was first introduced

to the intricate geography of cracked road surfaces, unstable foundations, endless faulty layouts and hairpin bends, eroded slopes and damaged roadside ditches and culverts "patched like old trousers". His overall verdict of the Trampoline, which he gave me at the end of his long presentation, was however much less technical and much more to the point. "The design of the road, the curves, all that you saw" -he declared as if trying to make sense to himself of an event he could not otherwise digest- "mirrors the nature of Colombians. The Colombian has a twisted nature, a treacherous nature. I could never understand that madness".

But "making sense" of the Trampoline or deconstructing his lapidary judgement, as I would learn through the many afternoons spent at Junín, was a very complex issue for Guillermo. Besides his minute knowledge of the road, he had a prodigious memory and passion for history that went far beyond the anatomy of underground drainages and landslides. For him, as for Franco or Jesús, the past revealed itself as a vital element to understand and give sense to the present time struggles around the road or the exclusionary and violent space of its potholes and police checkpoints. Yet, and unlike Franco and Jesús, for Guillermo history was not restricted to past memories or the historical event confined to the short or even mid-run. Rather, it was only through long time-spans or the *long duration* that present time or events made sense to him. Therefore the *event* for Guillermo, as in Braudel, appeared as "part of a unit of time much longer than its own duration", or "an indefinite chain of events and underlying realities, which seemingly cannot be separated from one another"; and *time*, consequently, "slowed, often to immobility".[50]

As a long time inhabitant of the Putumayo and descendant of early twentieth century colonisers, *neglect* was a key term within Guillermo's speech, one that summarised the state's policies (or lack of them) in the Putumayo. It origins, however -Guillermo insistently repeated- were centuries earlier to the birth of the Colombian state and had to be traced back to the border treaties between Spain and Portugal. From *Tordesillas* back in the late fifteenth century - when the kings of both empires first shared out the recently discovered

[50] Fernand Braudel, "History and the social sciences: the long duration", *Political Research, Organization and Design*, vol.3, no.5, (1960): 4, 7.

territories outside Europe- to *Madrid* and *San Ildefonso* in the eighteenth century –through which Spain acknowledged the *de facto* expansion of Portugal in South America well beyond the originally agreed limit-, *neglect*, cried Guillermo, was the word to describe the Spanish authorities' virtual absence in and lax attitude towards their vast Amazon dominions. "And after the twentieth of July 1810, Colombians did nothing to change this state of affairs" he said indignantly, blaming the c*reole* founders of the Republic for having inherited their predecessors' long and "unjustifiable" tradition of having an Amazon "tirada a la comemierda" (thrown to shit).

It was against this 'background' that the figure of Rafael Reyes burst onto the scene. Guillermo introduced him quoting by memory the introductory excerpt of the General's Memoirs chapter on the Putumayo: "In Pasto the region that extends to the east was known only as far as Mocoa, and beyond there the populace, ignorant of geography, thought it was Portugal". The phrase, opening the chronicle of Reyes' self-proclaimed 'discoveries' and 'conquests' in the Putumayo during the 1870s, allowed Guillermo to signal a landmark event in the region's history. The event was Reyes himself, and its significance so decisive from Guillermo's point of view that he did not hesitate in claiming that "the active presence of the state in this corner of the West Amazon began with Reyes"; "because looking back", he added, "there was nothing". This significance, moreover, was twofold. First, as entrepreneur, the *physical* presence and displacements of Reyes in the Putumayo, through its páramos, selvas and rivers, together with the nationalistic tone impregnating his journeys, seemed to Guillermo to have left an indelible *corporeal* trace of the state in its remote lands. "As an individual", recalled Guillermo, "Reyes *knew* Pasto, Mocoa, what is today Puerto Asís and Puerto Leguízamo, Iquitos, Manaus, Belem. And from there he *projected* all his activities to Rio de Janeiro, Lisbon, Paris, London, New York". No matter that these activities were mostly carried out for self-profit; "What really matters", he claimed, was that through them, "the Putumayo first appeared on the map". Even more significantly, as I noticed from Guillermo's exalted emphasis of the idea that Reyes "projected" those activities *from* and not *to* the Putumayo, was that the frontier -at least momentarily- surfaced at the centre rather than the periphery of this same map.

Secondly, as President, stressed Guillermo, Reyes began to translate into practice the "vision" he had developed decades before "as citizen and dreamer". "What was Reyes' vision? – he asked leaving a solemn pause, as if anticipating its grandeur and redemptive power- Reyes' vision was to connect the whole Amazon region to the world by establishing a trade route from Tumaco in the Pacific to the mouth of the Amazon in the Atlantic". The General's support for the Pasto-Mocoa road, which Guillermo was always eager to explain to the slightest detail through the map he kept from Miguel Triana's expedition (see chapter 2), could only be understood within this much broader and ambitious scheme. At the centre of this plan, speculated Guillermo, was Mocoa, a "fact" mirrored in Reyes' measure of creating the Intendancy of Putumayo with this town as the capital. "And it was Reyes", he asserted, "who recognised for the first time in history the name of Mocoa" and went on criticising those who argue that Mocoa is the oldest town of the Colombian Amazon and "rivals in age with Bogotá". For Guillermo, it was clear that the difference between 'exist' and 'not exist' lay not in age but in the gap between *recognition* and *neglect.*

So imposing was the image and legacy of Reyes for Guillermo that he could easily reconcile the failed existence of the Intendancy (it lasted one year), or even the fact that the General's inter-oceanic plan never materialised beyond the ambitious map he presented at the Pan-American Conference in Mexico. As for my references to the Putumayo Concession scandal which directly involved Reyes (chapter 1), he seemed to pay little attention to them and instead went back, just like Reyes did at his time, to recount again the General's nationalistic enterprises.

How to deal with the fact that the same "legitimate founder" of Mocoa, as Guillermo stubbornly maintained in his reference to Reyes, established a Penal Colony there for his political prisoners was a much thornier issue. More than a century had passed since this event took place and yet he declared himself "incapable" of reading the infamous presidential decree. For Guillermo's real trauma was rooted not in the isolated and short-time consequences of the legal act but its long-term effects. And here a third term, *resentfulness*, was added to his *long duration* historical vocabulary of state and frontier.

How it emerged had a straightforward explanation according to Guillermo: the Penal Colony had "hit the heart" of a good number of Colombians including the prisoners themselves, their wives, relatives, and friends, hence creating a "negative image of Mocoa", which eventually turned into a "national resentment" towards the place. Reyes' implicit responsibility in this episode constituted an issue Guillermo admitted but did not like to dwell on, limiting himself to say that it was perhaps "the desperate act of a statesman" yet something he, Guillermo Guerrero, "could had never reconciled in mind and heart".

Guillermo's somewhat schematic and simplified connection between the event of the Penal Colony and a supposed "national" rancour towards his hometown, had nevertheless an inner logic. As with most Mocoanos, this event was linked and fundamental to make sense of another event which would leave a long lasting scar in the town and its people: the construction of the Trampoline, and more specifically the fact that the road avoided the Province's capital. Here Guillermo's statement was categorical: "The road was built to punish Mocoa", he said emphatically, and proceeded to narrate his version of the story, the same I had heard on multiple occasions except for the exceptional attention paid to detail:

> The government of Abadía Mendez orders in 1927 the studies for the road Pasto-Puerto Asís. Mocoa was not mentioned in the study. The engineer responsible for the studies was Alfonso Paz, from Popayán, son of one of the prisoners of the Penal Colony. Then came the war with Peru, and the government of Olaya Herrera urgently orders the construction of the road "como se pueda" (by any means). And who is put in charge of the road? The engineer Sebastián Ospina, nephew of another prisoner. And listen: both Alfonso and Sebastián said in public that as long as they were the managers, the road would never pass through Mocoa, because the road was a revenge against the town of Mocoa. And they explained. They said: "because my father or my uncle was there, imprisoned by a barbarian named Reyes, the dictator Rafael Reyes". And when the road eventually arrived to Pepino and the people of Mocoa made their first trips to see, they could corroborate that madness, that nonsense!

As if in its "madness" and "nonsense" the episode demanded evidence to prove it was real, Guillermo listed people, "regrettably dead", who met the engineers and personally witnessed the moment they pronounced their cruel sentence. Then, he went on to tell the heavy toll paid by Mocoa as a consequence of the engineers' revenge: of its abandonment and isolation for more than 60 years, until 1991, when the Mocoa-Pitalito road was opened, according to Guillermo a "compensation measure" that was offered by the government

since the late 1940; of its decline and widespread poverty that came when it was converted into a "peripheral settlement within a peripheral region" –which he illustrated with his own family, once well-off and then reduced to "self-subsistence"; and of its many decades of struggles and unfulfilled promises that took the town and its afflicted inhabitants back to their immemorial condition of *neglect*.

"Was the conduct of certain Colombians against the Putumayo and Mocoa justified?" - asked Guillermo visibly irritated upon finishing his recount of the decades of misfortunes suffered on account of the evil engineers- "No, but the heart of Colombians is like that, treacherous". His rhetorical question seemed both intended to lay blame on a past individual crime and at the same time on a much more abstract condition and intangible offender. For, beyond the need to 'make sense of the nonsense' by seeking scapegoats and resuscitating witnesses, it was evident that the 'offence', still unsettled, was rooted in the long-run chain of events. His ensuing claim, both retrospective and prospective, was illuminating:

> The Colombian state has a social and economic debt with the Putumayo. Why is there such a debt? Because of its oil, its precious woods, for the fact of being a national territory, for the people that inhabits this territory. What do we need? We need a modern road between Mocoa and Pasto. What does a modern road mean? A road with a design speed between 40 and 60 kilometres per hour, so that we can travel from Mocoa to Pasto in two hours and not in 18 like in the past or 7 in the present.

Yet Guillermo's views on the significance of this "modern road" extended way beyond the reduction of travel times between Mocoa and Pasto, and it constituted a subject he could talk about for hours. Broadly, this road meant *physical* "connection" and "integration", and here he lectured at length about the new road being the core segment of the IIRSA Tumaco-Belem inter-oceanic corridor, the scheme that would at last see Reyes' vision realised (he himself had his own parallel proposal linked to this project: the Amazon Road Network, a plan he had presented years ago at a national congress on transport infrastructure, and which basically contemplates a network of river and road routes linking Colombia, Brazil and Venezuela, and has Mocoa at its geographical centre). Most essentially, however, this road meant a long-awaited infrastructure that would finally "redeem" both Mocoa and the

Putumayo from its *long lasting* peripheral and neglected condition. And here he asked again, as if hoping perhaps the question itself might bring the government to reason: "for what sense does it make to Bogotá to keep having a Mocoa, a Putumayo, an Amazon, thrown to shit?"

Uneven frontiers

Guillermo and I could never entirely agree about Reyes' inter-oceanic scheme or its resuscitated version under the IIRSA Tumaco-Belem mega project. Where I saw in the project the continuation of certain political and economic logic, he tirelessly emphasised its countless benefits for Mocoa, the Putumayo, and the Amazon region in general. When we sporadically came across my research, he would put forward arguments he deemed irrefutable, and often concluded our discordant dialogues with the same statement: "In any case, don't forget to include in your thesis that roads are fundamental for development".

With time, this periodic ritual of irreconcilable visions revealed to me how the act of making sense is deeply rooted not only in *how* we situate ourselves against events, but *where* we are situated in relation to them. Guillermo's perceptions, for instance, are those of a historian for whom events only make sense in connection to others, often located in very distant times and places. Franco's, meanwhile, are strongly attached to the genealogy of struggles and the ways in which he situates himself in the lineage of popular leaders. And Jesús', in turn, are mediated by his emotional relationship with the road's deadly topography and daily conflicts with the authorities. Yet, all these perceptions are rooted in and emerge from a same spatio-temporal *situation* and they all express a similar sentiment: a sense of occupying a marginal position or place in the Colombian state or, more specifically, of being included to it through a series of exclusion -historical, spatial, political, and symbolic- acts.

This sense, as I tried to illustrate in the first part of the chapter, is related to the vital significance, both physical and imaginary, that roads have had in the life of the Putumayo, and the ways in which they materially and symbolically incarnate ideas such as "modernity", "progress", "development", and so for forth. As these ideas lie at the core of the narrative

in which the project of the state is founded, the dramatic history of the road and the tragic *event* of the Trampoline plainly revealed the obverse side of this same narrative: isolation, abandonment, confinement, backwardness, neglect. Although the everyday realities these terms conveyed seemed to conjure an image of remoteness or even absence of the state, they ultimately rendered its presence more visible: through Jesús' abhorred INVIAS officers, police and army checkpoints; Franco's ignominious local politicians and archive of unsuccessful grievances to the bureaucrats from the country's capital; and Guillermo's neglectful colonial authorities, insensitive nation's founders, and treacherous engineers.

There are two elements or dimensions present in the narratives of these characters, both of which are crucial within the relation of *inclusive exclusion* of frontier and state. The first element is about the way in which the three narratives speak of how Jesús, Franco, and Guillermo, in *consciously* situating themselves and others not merely as geographical and historical but essentially moral subjects –or alternatively, in apprehending history and space morally- make sense and call into question this relationship. Put differently, these are narratives that, though in different ways, express both the pervasiveness of this relationship in the lives of frontier peoples and the way in which they contest it.

The second element is more complex and has to do with how we can overcome the idea of the state and frontier as homogeneous and antagonistic realms. In the previous chapters, I have addressed this question by exploring the state and the frontier in terms of the material and discursive practices through which they are mutually constructed. I have repeatedly emphasised that what defines these practices is the relation of *inclusive exclusion* through which the latter has been incorporated into the former's political and spatial order. In doing so, the different characters which have been introduced to reconstruct and interrogate what I have called the historical geography of state and frontier, have been primarily conceived as different expressions of this relationship. Some of these characters speak of how this relation was conceived or put in to practice, while others mirror the different ways in which it is experienced or challenged. But the crucial aspect about such characters, from the Putumayo's politicians, road activists and historians to central government officers and

statesmen, is that they are different *expressions* of this relationship rather than embodiments of the "frontier" or the "state" as such.

This last aspect is central in Jesús, Franco and Guillermo's narratives, for they all represent examples not only of how this relationship is experienced and contested, but also how it is reproduced, especially through the broader historical narrative in which they are embedded and the silences present in such narratives. For instance, it was noted how in Franco's assiduous exaltation of the Capuchin mission and the colonisers' role in the past and present history of the road, the violent dynamics underlying this history were concealed. This same silence is present in Guillermo's narrative, in this case via his admiration of Rafael Reyes' character and vision, a vision which as previously described was consummated by the production of different silences. And it is also manifest in Jesús' argument on the Indians' "debt" with the "whites" for help them overcome their "savage" state.

These silences stem all from a same hegemonic "civilising" narrative through which the relationship between state has been constructed and is sustained, and whose origins were already discussed. In this sense, they can be better understood if we think of them not as intentional or conscious silences but silences that reflect how dominant narratives interpellate subjects in different ways. Following Trouillot, these are silences that ultimately mirror the uneven power in the process of production and narration of history, and thus have to be traced back to the origins of this process.[51] These silences are crucial within the historical geography of frontier and state, for they reveal how the former is not a homogeneous space or, more specifically, how it constitutes above all a *condition* of *inclusive exclusion* which expresses in highly uneven and differentiated ways among individuals and spaces.

[51] Trouillot, *Silencing the past*, 48.

Chapter 5
On the illegibility effects of state practices

In December 2009, almost 80 years after an engineer depicted the Capuchin road in the San Francisco-Mocoa section as an "eyesore" and urged the government its total replacement,[1] we read the following description of its successor, the "Trampoline of death":

> There are serious traffic restrictions on the section of road (78 km) between San Francisco and Mocoa (capital of the Putumayo) built in the 1930s, which has long 4-metre wide stretches where only one vehicle can pass, high gradients, unstable areas, constant cloudiness, and sharp cliffs, making this one of the roads with the highest accident rate in the country.[2]

This brief and technical diagnosis, one amongst many which for decades have accompanied this infamous road, promised however to put a definite end to it. Its source, an IADB loan proposal approved in that same month, contemplates the construction of an alternate road along the right bank of the Mocoa River, following roughly the same route the Capuchin missionaries chose a century earlier. The new road, originally expected to be concluded over a period of eight years, will significantly shorten the distance –from 78 to 45.6 kilometres- and travel time –3 to 1.5 hours- between Mocoa and San Francisco. As for the Trampoline, the project plans to turn it into an "eco-touristic corridor".

The IADB proposal makes no mention to the long history of struggles or the countless pleas and strikes demanding the replacement of the current road. It does, however, make great emphasis on terms such as "efficiency", "safety", "competitiveness", "sustainable

[1] Rafael Agudelo to Minister of Public Works, 11 Dec. 1932, AGN, MOP, Vol.3273, fols.199-214.
[2] IADB, "San Francisco-Mocoa alternate road construction project-Phase I. Loan Proposal", December 17, 2009. Accessed March 10, 2010, http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=35025319

development", "governance" and "strengthening of the state", referring both to the project's chief objectives and the Bank's overall strategy for the country. Considerable weight is also put on the issue of economic and physical integration, both at the national and regional levels. The latter is explicitly linked in the document to the IIRSA initiative (see chapter 1), within which the road is considered a priority project, as it will allow inter-oceanic communication between the Atlantic Pacific oceans through Brazil and Colombia.

Although the association of the project with IIRSA has raised strong criticism from NGOs and citizen and indigenous movements about its extractivist logic and its potential social and environmental impacts,[3] for most Putumayenses the road represents a subject so sensitive that it often appears beyond dispute. A clear example of this constitutes the tensions between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, where the former have been constantly accused of "enemies" or "obstacles" to "development", mostly due to their protest against the government's refusal to carry out a process of "consulta previa", based on his argument that there were no indigenous communities or resguardo lands in the road's direct area of influence.[4]

The expectations about the future road are many and diverse. At the more abstract level, the road is largely imagined as an infrastructure that promises to deliver "progress", "development" or even "modernity", regardless the varied and conflicting meanings and visions which these concepts tend to embody. At a more concrete level, it is conceived in terms of the tangible benefits it promises: shorter travel times and lower costs, greater comfort, and above all safety. For many, moreover, the road is synonymous with

[3] For a detailed account of criticisms to the projects see Margarita Flórez, *Selva Abierta: Vía Pasto-Mocoa e hidrovía del Putumayo: expresiones en Colombia de la Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana* (Bogotá: *IIRSA*, BIC, 2007). See also Carolina Salazar and Vince McElhinny, "Carretera Pasto Mocoa - Colombia: BID Compromiso a la Sostenibilidad en la Mira". BICECA, 2008. Accessed January 10, 2009, http://www.bicusa.org/es/Article.10935.aspx

[4] The Consulta previa (prior consultation) constitutes a fundamental right held by Indigenous peoples and other ethnic groups which basically require them to be consulted in the case of infrastructure projects that might affect their territories. For a detailed analysis of the conflict around the Consulta Previa in the context of the road project see Ana María Chaparro, "Dimensión humana del desarrollo. Visión de futuro indígena y su incidencia en el desarrollo en Colombia. El caso de las comunidades Inga y Kamëntza (Putumayo) ante la Iniciativa para la Integración de la Infraestructura Regional Suramericana (IIRSA)" (MSc thesis, Universidad de los Andes, 2013).

opportunity. Some harbour plans of starting up a small business on the side of the road or buying a piece of land for speculative purposes, even though the project includes several measures to avoid these activities. Others hope to get a job, although most of the available positions for locals contemplated in the project are the lowest paid and fall under the category of "unqualified". Politicians, meanwhile, regularly proclaim their great commitment to the project or even campaign by portraying themselves as its biggest supporters. Expectations, on the other hand, are not confined to the local level, and the most illustrative example is perhaps provided by a number of mining concessions granted to multinational companies within the project's area.

During 2010, the year I lived in the Putumayo, and 2011, when I came back for a short period of time, those plans and expectations remained largely as mere speculative prospects or hopes, just as the road itself.[5] Nevertheless, if taken together, they comprised a multi-layered cartography through which a single space was appropriated in multiple and often incompatible ways. This space, the relatively small area to be crossed by the road and its immediate surroundings, on the other hand, was not empty. Its inhabitants, largely peasant colonisers from Nariño, were estimated by one of the project's several evaluations in around 1,500 and classified as the population under the road's "direct area of influence".[6] For them, although not devoid of expectations, the road represented primarily a source of everyday uncertainties about their present and future. To a large extent, those uncertainties stem from the project's several safeguard policies, themselves to be translated into a myriad of land use and environmental measures and restrictions in the area. Yet what these uncertainties -together with the many tensions and conflicts they involved- exposed was a much broader issue, namely, the project's rationale of rendering a target territory and population *legible* in order to make it *governable*.

[5] The works, initially expected to start by May 2010, did not begin until February 2012.

[6] INCOPLAN. "Elaboración del Plan Básico de Manejo Ambiental y Social (PBMAS) de la Reserva Forestal Protectora de la Cuenca Alta del Río Mocoa. Tomo III. 'Componente de diagnóstico socioeconómico y cultural'", BID, Corpoamazonia, Invias, July, 2008, 68, accessed November 15, 2011, http://www.iadb.org/es/proyectos/project-information-page,1303.html?id=co-l1019#doc

This chapter addresses this subject of legibility in relation to the road project and has two main objectives. The first is to discuss legibility within the context of the project's goals and objectives. Specifically, I show how the project involved a series of conceptual premises and methods that despite their claims to objectivity and scientific validity did not so much produce accurate *contents* as privileged certain *forms* of knowledge and expertise while excluding or subordinating others. In this way, legibility is revealed not just as a *condition* required for the successful realisation of the project's different goals but as a *means* to turn a specific territory and population into an object of governmental intervention.

The second aim is to consider legibility in relation to the gap between the project's "theory" and "practice". I will focus on the project's attempts to clarify the land tenure situation in its area of influence, as it constitutes a clear example where this gap became particularly evident. Specifically, I illustrate how these attempts not only brought to the surface the state's deeply rooted or "structural" legibility problems in the project's area but paradoxically ended up aggravating them. However, it will be argued, this situation cannot be grasped only in relation to the issues the project identified but those it did not take into account or was unable to recognise, and in particular people's customary land tenure practices.

As will be described in the last part of the chapter, a significant aspect of those practices is that, as they accentuated the distance and conflicts between "project" and "community" they projected an image of these spheres as two isolated and diametrically opposite domains. However, the point I want to stress is quite the opposite or how those same practices, rather than drawing a neat line demarcating these domains, evidenced or reflected the multiple encounters and interactions between them. In doing so, I will shed light on the everyday imbrications and entanglements between frontier and state.

"The illusion of transparency"

One of the common views of roads, especially within the anthropological and ethnographic discipline, emphasises their role as technologies of state power.[7] This view largely stems from the fact that roads, regardless of the ends to which they have been conceived, constitute infrastructures that render territories and populations more "legible" or visible to state surveillance and control.

The principle of legibility, on the other hand, is by no means confined to physical infrastructure and it has usually been conceived as an intrinsic aspect of state-making practices. A good example of an approach to the state from this perspective is Scott's critique of twentieth century socio-spatial engineering projects.[8] Those "great utopian" projects, which range from the Soviet Collectivization to the construction of Brasilia, and to the centralisation of road networks in nineteenth century France, are according to Scott bounded by a common history: they all resulted from a High-modernist ideology, whose ultimate objective was to make societies legible, no matter the cost, in order to render them governable. The principle of legibility, which in Scott's analysis is equated to Foucault's panopticon,[9] appears as a radical, and in most cases disastrous, simplification (biological, social, and spatial) of the world, whose underlying motives are "appropriation, control, and manipulation".[10] Furthermore, legibility, as noted by Trouillot, is not solely bound to the state apparatus and it can be better recognised as an "effect" of both government and non-government practices and institutions (NGOs and multilateral agencies, among others),

[7] See, amongst others, Fiona Wilson, "Towards a Political Economy of Roads: Experiences from Peru", *Development and Change vol.* 35, no.3 (2004): 525-546; Adeline Masquelier, "Road mythographies: space, mobility, and the historical imagination in postcolonial Niger", *American Ethnologist*, vol.29, no.4 (2002): 829-856; Tom Selwyn, "Landscapes of separation: reflections in the symbolism of by-pass roads in Palestine", in *Contested Landscapes. Movement, exile and place*, eds. Barbara Bender and Margot Winer, 225-240 (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001); James Fairhead, "Paths of Authority: Roads, the State and the Market in Eastern Zaire", *The European Journal of Development Research*, vol.4, no.2 (1992): 17-35.

[8] Scott, *Seeing…*

[9] *Legibility*, according to Scott, "implies a viewer whose place is central and whose vision is synoptic" (Scott, *Seeing,* 79).

[10] Scott, *Seeing*, 77.

which implies "the production of both a language and a knowledge for governance and of theoretical and empirical tools that classify and regulate collectivities".[11]

This "legibility effect" was implicitly present in the San Francisco-Mocoa road project, most patently in the assumption that the future road will foster "greater State presence" and strength "local governance mechanisms".[12] For the most part, however, and due to the project's extensive safeguard measures and its aim of protecting the environment on its area of influence, legibility was implied not as an anticipated *effect* but a central *precondition* for its successful implementation. Thus, three exhaustive assessments covering the multiple technical, social, environmental and economic dimensions and strategies of the project were developed by different consulting firms prior to its final approval: the EAR (Strategic Regional Assessment), examining the project's potential environmental and social risks and opportunities at the national, regional and local levels; the EIA (Environmental Impact Study), which designed an environmental management plan aimed at minimising the road's impacts upon its direct area of influence during both its construction and operation phases; and the PBMAS (Basic Environmental and Social Plan for the Protected Forest Reserve of the upper Mocoa river basin), aimed at defining the strategies and measures for the conservation of a Forest Reserve to be traversed by the road. These studies were subsequently synthesised in the PMASIS (Integrated Sustainable Environmental and Social Plan), conceived as the project's main management instrument to be followed and implemented by the different actors and institutions involved in the project.

Together, these assessments devised several measures which range from high environmental standards for the road design and awareness campaigns with local communities to numerous control and supervision activities including surveillance by radar and satellite imagery, permanent rangers and checkpoints along the route, and telemetric monitoring of wildlife. What is of interest here is not so much the specificity and scope of

[11] Michel Rolph Trouillot, "The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization: Close Encounters of the Deceptive Kind", *Current Anthropology*, Vol.42, no.1, (2001): 126.
[12] IADB, "San Francisco-Mocoa alternate road construction", 3.

such measures but the premise on which they are sustained. That is, that in order to be successfully implemented, they require and presuppose as *sine qua non* condition a highly detailed knowledge of the area to be affected by the project. This condition might look obvious and elemental if seen from the planner's aims and perspectives. Not so obvious, however, are the underlying logic and paradoxes involved in the planner's discourse and practice. In order to better illustrate this point, I will focus on one of those assessments – the PBMAS-, as it fully exposes not only the logic and paradoxes, but the way in which they relate to the subject of legibility.

As noted, the PBMAS study was conceived as a social and environmental plan for the zone to be directly affected by the project. It covered an approximate area of 70,000 hectares, even though it focused primarily on the Forest Reserve (comprising half of this area) to be dissected by the road, for which it devised four wide-ranging strategies: environmental land use; conservation and sustainable development; involvement of local communities; and operation, surveillance and control.[13] These strategies derived from an extensive and thick assessment consisting of various volumes covering its different components (environmental, juridical, institutional, cultural, biophysical). The overall study was described as "an unprecedented detailed scientific knowledge of the Reserve and its area of influence"[14] and, at least, if considered from the amount of data provided, this definition holds true. Through its numerous maps, charts, synoptic tables and texts, the reader can get a fair sense, sometimes excessive, of the Reserve's many aspects and variables, from precipitation levels, to geologic and topographic analyses, to geo-referenced native species, and to its inhabitants' cultural traditions, average incomes and mortality rates.

[13] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico"...

[14] Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, "Informe de Gestión Ambiental y Social (IGAS). Corredor vial Pasto-Mocoa. Variante San Francisco-Mocoa (CO-L1019)", October 2009, accesed August 3, 2010, http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=2222785

Upper Mocoa River Forest Reserve (June 2010)

"Detailed scientific knowledge", despite the objectivity this claim suggests, must not however be confused with accuracy, at least if we interpret this term as the faithful correspondence between facts on the ground and facts on paper. If we stick to this definition, the PBMAS study could be better portrayed, quoting Lefebvre, as conjuring up an "illusion of transparency" or an illusion through which "space appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein".[15] Here, space is rendered intelligible not by means of fidelity but by concealing or ignoring those elements antagonistic or threatening "transparency". In other words, "transparency" results not from the correspondence between reality and representation, but as the effect or the illusion that representation creates of reality, an illusion that, as Lefebvre argues, cannot be detached from the connection between ideology and knowledge.

Lefebvre's "illusion of transparency", which he associates with the capitalist production of space, can be connected with Mitchell's remark on the nature of modern forms of calculation. The development of such forms, he notes, "did not produce a more accurate

[15] Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 27.

knowledge of the world, despite its claims, nor even any overall increase in the quantity of knowledge. Its achievement was to redistribute forms of knowledge, increasing it in some places and decreasing it in others".[16] The most pervasive effect of this modern "regime of calculation" -together with the simplification, reformatting and translation practices it entails- as the author stresses elsewhere, is not that representation is detached from social reality but that "social reality is to be ordered according to the principle of representation".[17]

The PBMAS's claims to "scientific knowledge" can be better appreciated in this light, and the most striking example is perhaps provided by its "Socioeconomic and Cultural Diagnosis".[18] Carried out mostly among the settlements in the road's area, classified by the project as the "direct social actors", this diagnosis was defined as highly participative and inclusive and its methodology included several workshops, household surveys and socialisation meetings. Yet, and somewhat paradoxically, the same study listed at the beginning a number of pre-defined "basic concepts" guiding the analysis such as "community", "participation", "territory", "social process" and "sustainability". Others, such as "development" or "sustainable development", are claimed to be "collectively constructed" throughout the process, though they differ little from their standard definitions.[19] This conceptual "bias" becomes even more manifest in the section on "peasant culture", where stereotypes of the "peasant" and the "coloniser" are widely reproduced. Thus, the "peasant" is persistently portrayed as bearer of a "traditional culture", expressed in terms such as prevalence of self-subsistence economies, survival of folk beliefs or deep attachment to the land. At the same time, nevertheless, he is associated to a "colono culture", characterised mostly in negative terms. For instance, their arrival in the Putumayo at the times of the Capuchin mission is described variously as causing "a break of the ecological balance kept during centuries by the pre-Columbian man", an

[16] Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts. Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), 92.
[17] Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity", in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell, 1-34 (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 25.
[18] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico"…
[19] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico", 6-9.

"alteration of the traditional production systems", and an "uncontrolled destruction of forests".[20]

It is not the aim here to discuss the pervasiveness of stereotypes or tropes regarding the peasant or coloniser in official and academic discourse or in the specific case of the PBMAS study.[21] Rather, the point I would like to stress is how, together, these tropes comprise a predetermined discursive framework or language through which the different project's "social actors" are studied, surveyed, and ultimately assimilated to it. Seen this way, the project's "diagnosis" goal can be conceived not just as a way to render legible a specific territory and population, but to turn that same territory and population into an object of government. Not surprisingly, a continuous thread throughout the "Socio-economic and Cultural Diagnostic" is the propensity to catalogue the Reserve's inhabitants simultaneously as a "threat" and "strategic allies" for the project. Hence, its emphasis, summarised under its proposed "management model", regarding the relevance of "governance mechanisms" from strengthening of local institutions to self-government education processes, and to involvement of the local community in environmental management and surveillance measures for the Reserve.[22]

A first paradox resulting from this assessment exercise is that even despite the project's self-proclaimed participatory approach, its different outputs, *legible* to the planner, ended up being *illegible* to the project's "stakeholders". This situation was made manifest during the project's many "socialisation workshops"[23] with the inhabitants of the Reserve. More than 50 such meetings took place during fieldwork, and those which I attended unfolded in

[20] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico", 20.
[21] For a detailed discussion on this subject in the specific context of the Putumayo and Amazon regions see Margarita Chaves, "Identidad y representación entre indígenas y colonos de la Amazonia occidental Colombiana", in *Identidad, modernidad y desarrollo*, ed. María Lucía Sotomayor, 283-296 (Bogotá: Ican-Colciencias, 1998). See also Maria Clemencia Ramírez, *Entre el estado y la guerrilla: identidad y ciudadanía en el movimiento de los campesinos cocaleros del Putumayo* (Bogotá: ICANH, Colciencias, 2001), 44-52; Mariano Useche, "La cuestión étnica y el desarrollo regional en la Amazonia colombiana", Amazonia, Identidad y Desarrollo, Simposio V Congreso de Antropología (Bogotá: Fondo FEN, 1989), 53-61.
[22] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico de Manejo", 76-80.
[23] These workshops constituted a later stage of the project and, as their name suggests, were mostly aimed at disseminating its projected strategies and measures in the short and long term.

a similar way.[24] They were all introduced by a group of professional technicians[25] from Corpoamazonia (the project's main environmental authority) who presented a summary of the studies' results, in this case the PBMAS, and the devised measures. Great emphasis was placed on the future land use and environmental restrictions within the Reserve, as well as the development of "sustainable projects" with those to be affected by them. This point, understandably, was the one that always generated more tension, expectations and concerns among the participants. Usually, the professionals stressed, often referring back to the project's participatory approach, the importance of the community's initiative on the formulation of those projects. The participants, on the other hand, repeatedly manifested their lack of understanding or skills required to formulate such projects according to the established guidelines and procedures. The professionals, knowing by experience that this constituted a familiar issue with development projects, often found it difficult to reply. In some occasions, however, they came up with ingenious answers such as this one I heard from a specialist in project management who insisted the solution was to be found within the same communities:

> Don't be fooled. When the project's people come don't let them diagnose you: you have to say 'we are already diagnosed from within'…You might say "Ah, it happens that we are peasants and don't know about projects". I tell you again: in many rural areas I've found with surprise illustrious professionals that know plenty. Why are they not involved? This is a question I have in mind.[26]

The specialist's answer, though offering a "solution" to the participants' concern, not only did not question the project's "participatory" rationale but expressly reaffirmed it. This same rationale was differently expressed in the intervention of a peasant leader during the same meeting. Contradicting the same specialist's observation on the restriction of agricultural practices on lands exceeding a slope of 30%, he said:

> This is the point that must be discussed: that you may say one thing theoretically but the community knows another thing. Because I can tell: if the terrain is like this (steep) nothing could be done. But if the terrain is like this (flatter), there I can. So don't come and tell me that there I can't, because I know the slopes in this area are less steep. One

[24] I attended nine such meetings between April and December 2010.
[25] Agronomists, lawyers, sociologists and other professionals from related disciplines hired by the project.
[26] Socialisation workshop, Mocoa, June 11 2010.

> thing is the norm and another what the people live and do. This has been the main problem: that the institution says one thing and sticks to it and we from experience and practice tell you another thing.

The crucial point here, as we can infer from the leader's objection, is not so much his perception of the planner's misconceptions on land use but how, under the project's rationale of "participation", the former's experience rooted in "practice" often ended up subordinated to the latter's expertise backed by the "norm". Yet, and despite the immanent logic embedded in this rationale –that reality is to be superseded by its own representation- the same objection also evinced the breach between the realm of the norm and the level of practice or "what people live and do". This breach, which in the project would become especially manifest in its attempts to clarify the complex land situation within the Forest Reserve, would expose another paradox. For those attempts, as we shall see next, not only laid bare the state's severe legibility problems but ended up exacerbating them.

The Forest Reserve's cadastral "confusion"

As mentioned previously, one of the project's core strategies was environmental land use. As part of this strategy various policies were devised, including environmental education, the adjustment of municipality land use plans of both Mocoa and San Francisco, and contingency plans to contain the urban expansion and settlement along the road. Although these policies covered a wide area beyond the project's direct area of intervention, the main emphasis was on the Forest Reserve to be crossed by the road. In theory, this legal figure perfectly fitted the project's conservation goals, since in legal terms Forest Reserves constitute zones aimed exclusively at the rational establishment, preservation or use of forest areas. The Forest Reserve of the upper Mocoa river basin, on the other hand, falls under the category of "protected", meaning that its only allowed activity is the extraction of "secondary fruits of the forest" (non-timber products such as seeds, resins and fruits). Nevertheless, the law establishes that Forest Reserves can be subjected to partial subtractions in case of "public utility" or "social interest" activities. Such is the case of the road, 70% (30 kilometres) of which will be built within the Reserve. Thus, and in order to mitigate the road's impact in the area, the project not only designed several control and surveillance measures but contemplated an extensive management plan –the PBMAS- to

guarantee its effective conservation. The latter included, besides the aforementioned policies, the extension of the actual Reserve –from 34,600 to 65,300 hectares- under the consideration that this would consolidate a large conservation corridor by connecting different protected areas across the region.

In practice, however, things turned out to be much less straightforward. As noted, the implementation of all the proposed plans and measures for the Reserve required first an exhaustive survey, to be carried out by the PBMAS' different diagnosis components. These components, including the "Socio-economic and cultural" described above, were mostly extensive descriptions of the Reserve's physical and human elements. The "Legal Diagnosis",[27] aimed at examining both the different legal aspects related to the Reserve and its cadastral situation, was not different in this sense. Yet, if seen from the angle of its final outcomes, this diagnosis study did not bring any "transparency", not even the illusion of it. On the contrary, what it revealed was the deep-rooted and structural illegibility of the state's own practices in the area.

The study in question identified a number of issues mirroring or accounting for this illegibility condition: the available official maps of the Reserve were of an inadequate scale to allow decision making regarding its management; the institutional presence in the area was scarce, hence translating into deficient control and surveillance; and its boundaries, having never being demarcated, remained largely unknown. Although serious, these issues were to be addressed during the project implementation stage.

A related and yet much more complex and difficult problem constituted the land occupation of the Reserve, a situation resulting in part from and revealing its many legal holes and inconsistencies. The first of these legal issues lay in the origins of the Reserve. Created in 1984, it had been conceived to preserve the upper basin of the Mocoa River with the aim of developing there a small hydroelectric plant for Mocoa and other Putumayo towns. However, this project never materialised, which according to the law means that the

[27] 'Componente de diagnóstico jurídico e institucional' in INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico de Manejo"… Tomo IV.

administrative act giving rise to the Reserve would have lost "binding force" or practical effect after five years of its creation. The study, although acknowledging this situation, argued -resorting to the country's intricate legal system- that it could be objected by claiming that the expiration of such legal act was never officially declared.

But the legal conundrum of the Reserve did not stop there. A more difficult problem to settle was the fact that the Reserve was never registered in Mocoa's "Oficina de Instrumentos Públicos" (Public Instruments Office), a requirement which basically consists of a legal procedure to make public to third parties any "limitation of domain" (e.g. land restrictions and forfeitures) over private or public property. In the case of the Reserve, the registration was essential to publicise the different restrictions pertaining to this specific protective figure, the most relevant of which constitutes the prohibition of land adjudication and settlement within its borders and surrounding areas. This issue was extensively addressed both in the PBMAS "Legal Diagnosis" and a latter separate assessment.[28] Both reports, although analysing every possible legal way to solve this problem, could not conceal a critical paradox: that the Forest Reserve -unmapped, un-demarcated and unregistered- not only remained a space illegible to the state, but the state, failing to meet its own legal codes, had himself contributed to exacerbate this condition. The latter report's observation on the complex land settlement of the Reserve plainly evidenced this situation:

> From the information gathered so far, there exists [within the Reserve] an amalgam of owners with titles, recipients of baldíos[29] granted after the creation of the Reserve, possessors, some of them registered, amongst others.[30]

This remark sought to summarise the conclusions of a cadastral survey carried out as part of the PBMAS "Legal Diagnosis", which the same report judged incomplete and thus urged

[28] "Análisis, identificación y propuesta de instrumentos legales de ocupación del suelo en el área de influencia de la variante San Francisco-Mocoa, con el fin de aclarar y asegurar la tenencia y controlar los usos de la tierra y de los recursos naturales por parte de los habitantes de la Reserva Forestal", in Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, "Informe de Gestión" (annex).
n.d. accessed August 3, 2010 http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=2222785
[29] As previously noted (chapter 3), *baldíos* are state-owned lands subjected to be granted to individuals who comply with certain requirements established by the law.
[30] "Análisis, identificación y propuesta", 53.

a new and more extensive one. Despite its incompleteness and "inaccuracy" (explained partly as a consequence of the Reserve's indeterminate boundaries), a brief review of this survey sheds light on the state-assisted chaotic land occupation of the Reserve.

The survey examined 150 deeds, distributed in the ten "veredas" (rural settlements) overlapping the Reserve. Four main legal types of land tenure were identified: "Plena propiedad" (absolute ownership) or lands originally granted by the government with public deeds and clean chain of title (83 cases); "falsa tradición" (false tradition) or lands whose titles are considered flawed or clouded, a situation generally resulting when someone who lacks "absolute ownership" sells or transfers his land to another person (10 cases); lands with public deeds but broken chain of title, a situation caused by different factors, including old deeds not listed in the Registry Office databases (12 cases); and occupied lands with cadastral numbers or deeds certifying not the land property but the "mejoras" (land improvements such as crops and buildings) made by the tenant on lands claimed as baldíos -though in practice are non-alienable as they are believed to fall within the Reserve- (45 cases).

In theory, and due to the Reserve's category of "Protected", private property of any sort there should not exist within its boundaries. Thus, at the moment of its creation all existing private lands, possessions and "mejoras" within the Reserve should have been expropriated or purchased by the government or, alternatively, land use restrictions enforced, procedures that were never followed. Most alarming, however, was the adjudication of lands or the official recognition of any kind of claims to property following its creation, of which the study identified 28 cases among the aforesaid categories (excluding that of lands with broken chain of title, for which the original date of adjudication could not be established).

A related and equally serious issue constituted the issuance of mining concessions overlapping the Reserve, some of them granted during the period in which the PBMAS was

being elaborated.[31] Although these concessions were at the time in their first stage ("exploration"), their mere existence, taking into account that mining is considered "not compatible" with Forest Reserves conservation status,[32] constitutes just another example of the gap between norm and practice.

Both the mining titles and land deeds analysed by the "Legal Diagnosis", though mirroring some of the material effects of the state's incongruous legal procedures, were to some extent readable or at least 'visible' to the project. Through their cadastral or land registration numbers, they could be identified in terms such as location, area, proprietor/concessionaire, and chain of title. Quite different was the case of the so-called "private documents" or documents aimed at demonstrating possession or occupation of lands claimed as baldíos. These can also be of different types, yet the most common ones are "contracts of sale" (written contracts formalising land sales between seller and buyer) and "extra-judicial statements" (out-of-court statements before a public notary declaring possession or occupancy of lands claimed as baldíos). Legally speaking, these documents are considered "private" since they do not comply with the requirements or follow the basic legal or administrative protocols of "public" documents: they are not inscribed in the Registry Office, do not have cadastral plans and land registration numbers, and in some cases are not even notarised. This does not mean, however, that they are 'illegal' or not recognised by public authorities. In many cases, for instance, they form part of the ordinary procedures for legal transactions of land such sales or cessions. In others (e.g. land adjudication processes) they may serve as proof of tenure or possession of land. Still, these documents alone or *per se* (e.g. without a land deed) do not have the same legal value of title deeds and, in the best case, may demonstrate or transfer possession but not ownership of land.

[31] The project identified four mining titles (in exploration phase) issued during 2007 and 2008, encompassing a total area of 7,830 hectares, 23% of which overlapped the Reserve (5.39% of its current area and 7.21% of the projected expanded area). In addition, it found a large oil concession (in prospection stage) overlapping 21.3% of the current Reserve. "Informe de Gestión Ambiental y Social", 144-145.

[32] The law, however, also contemplates that in the case of economic activities of "public utility" or "social interest" (including mining), Forest Reserves can be subjected to partial subtractions in order to allow such activities. INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico", Tomo IV, 11-15.

"Private documents", despite their extra or semi-legal character, constitute a very common way to trade lands among people and are often used with different purposes such evidence of tenure or access to government subsidies. Besides, sometimes their use can be associated to practices such as evading costs (sale or property taxes) or legal controls (e.g. lands that for different reasons cannot be formally traded). Moreover, and most significantly for the argument advanced here, these documents usually originate from real practices that do not necessarily take place outside or infringe the law (most of them are formalised before a public notary), and yet remain largely illegible to government functionaries. The "Legal Diagnosis", for instance, identified and examined 259 such documents (against the 150 deeds), provided by people themselves upon request. The examination in this case consisted basically of a summary of the type of document and information regularly supplied by each of them (e.g. name of seller/buyer/grantor, area/name of land plot). This information is not homogeneous across documents: some do not register areas or names of land plots, others lack notary seals, while others are hand-written papers whose content is literally illegible. However, this aspect is irrelevant if we consider that no matter how detailed or partial, fictitious or real, current or outdated, this information –unregistered, unrecorded, and un-georeferenced- is for its most part indecipherable to the cadastral surveyor.

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By the time the PBMAS study was completed, in July 2008, it was clear that the complex and in many cases indecipherable character of land occupation in the road's area of influence posed a serious challenge to the project's declared goals. Various alternatives to overcome this situation were proposed: partial subtractions of the Reserve's lands legally granted or demonstrating legal tenure; re-categorisation of part of the current Reserve to a class ("Protected-Protective Forest Reserve") with lesser land use restrictions; and purchase of lands legally owned and removal of tenants "illegally" occupying the Reserve (e.g. with no titles or titles deemed invalid). The problem, still, was that regardless of the alternative or combination of alternatives to be applied, in order to be viable, any option required first a clear understanding of the Reserve's cadastral situation on the ground. The

"Legal Diagnosis", as shown, rather than solving this problem, plainly exposed the Reserve's illegibility. It was on these grounds that a new and more exhaustive survey was recommended, aimed at updating and complementing the existing data in both the current Reserve and its projected expansion area.

Two years later, in 2010, this new survey had not been concluded and the Reserve land problems, far from being resolved, seemed to have actually worsened. This situation, on the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, was partly fostered by the project itself. With the expected starting date of the road works approaching, the project officers urged people to provide their land deeds or documents, while repeatedly stressing the prohibition of land transactions while the Reserve's legal situation was not clarified. It was evident, however, that the officers themselves were incapable of providing definite answers to many of the people's uncertainties and concerns about their future: Were their lands going to be expropriated by the government? Will they receive any compensation? Which lands exactly fell within and outside the Reserve? What will happen to those with invalid titles?

Unanswered or given ambiguous responses, these uncertainties ended up causing or increasing distrust among the inhabitants of the Reserve. A Project draft report by the end of 2010 acknowledged this problem when observing that in some veredas people had refused to provide their land titles. This situation, according to the report, was due to "the great distrust of communities in government institutions".[33] The version I got from a woman peasant leader was no different, although it made clear how the project's many studies were responsible for the current tensions between project workers and local communities. "No study has managed to make things clear. None", she said while complaining that during the last three years people from her vereda had handed in their land titles four times, but so far had not received any reply. And then she described the routine practice: "the lawyer comes and asks for copies of titles and then he gets lost and never shows up again. And then comes another study and a different lawyer and so forth. Because they continue to have that confusion".

[33] "Informe final para Bogotá", March 2010, n.p.

"That confusion", promoted by the state's incongruous legal practices and further accentuated by the project itself, exacerbated people's uncertainties and distrust, which in turn aggravated the Reserve land problems. This sort of vicious circle had become evident during 2010, when rumours about people selling or buying lands within the Reserve began to circulate with some regularity. Although at the time most of these rumours seemed to be just rumours, some did actually materialise. For example, a logger from one of the Reserve veredas told me he had recently sold –upon hearing that timber extraction would be strictly forbidden- half of a 100-hectare farm he owned located "right in the centre" of an area he'd heard would be crossed by the road. The sale, ironically, was facilitated by the fact that his farm did not have deeds but an old "contract of sale" through which he had originally acquired the land. This transaction -as others I heard at the time-, done through "private document", would inevitably add more confusion to the already chaotic cadastral situation of the Reserve.

By the end of 2011, the proliferation of land sale/buy signs posted along the project corridor (below) showed how this situation had intensified. These signs, though highly visible to the project, stood for deals that in most cases were illegible to it and hence beyond its control.

Requests to purchase and sales of land plots in the road project site (December 2010)

The crucial aspect of this "illegibility effect", I suggest, is not the ways in which it exposed the gap between "norm" and "practice" or "project" and "community", but rather how this

gap reflected the multiple dialectical entanglements between these apparently detached or independent spheres. In other words, as it was emphasised, the "peasant's indecipherable" land settlement practices could only be explained in connection to the government's normative inconsistencies, just as people's uncertainties and distrust could not be isolated from the project's cadastral "confusion" and the "diagnosis" methods through which it attempted to "clarify" it.[34] In this order of things, it is no longer surprising that the project's surveys did not only fail to overcome the land tenure issues they were confronted with but actually aggravated them. However, as I shall describe next, to fully grasp this illegibility effect, to understand its roots and how it is reproduced in time and space, we have to look not just to what the project "saw" but also to those elements which from the beginning it ignored or, confined to its conceptual framework, was unable to perceive.

Becoming illegible: a short case study

Campucana is one of the ten veredas which according to the project totally or partially overlapped with the Forest Reserve. It is located about 7 kilometres north-west from Mocoa following the old Capuchin road and it is one of the veredas to be dissected by the future road. The PBMAS estimated its population at 165 individuals distributed in 36 families, and based on the study's surveys and workshops summarised the main problems of the vereda as the loss of cultural traditions and values, lack of access to local and regional markets, and technical support in agriculture, the vereda's main economic activity.[35] While these problems differed little from those identified in the other veredas, the land tenure situation was among the most complex ones, as the study found that only 20% of the surveyed land plots had title deeds, while the missing 80% had only private documents, mostly "contracts of sale".[36]

[34] For a discussion on the different dimensions of illegibility in relation to everyday state-making practices see Veena Das, "The signature of the state. The paradox of Illegibility", in Das and Poole, *Anthropology,* 235-252.
[35] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico", Tomo III, 48-52.
[36] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico", Tomo III, 78.

The PBMAS "Legal Diagnosis", containing separate annexes for each vereda aimed at examining land titles and documents individually, found in Campucana most of the land issues commonly identified in the project's area: various land plots that the field surveys situated within the vereda but the titles located in others; lands granted after the creation of the Forest Reserve; and several cases of partial sales of plots with public deeds through private documents, some of which did not register areas or whose content was illegible.[37] If the detection of these issues exposed the intricate land tenure patterns within the vereda, the PBMAS did little to explain them. For instance, the brief chapter on Campucana from the "Socio-economic and Cultural Diagnosis" addressed the subject of land use in the vereda by simply observing that "the land tenure is legalised through public deeds and others (sic) by contracts of sale".[38]

In order to understand the origins and development of such patterns and its illegible character, we should look back to the colonisation history of this particular vereda, a story that goes back to the early times of the Capuchin road. As noted previously (chapters 2 and 3), the missionaries tirelessly encouraged the migration of colonisers to the region by highlighting the abundance of baldíos, a strategy that was also employed to attract workers for the road. Expectedly, the lands most coveted by those early colonisers were those located in nearby populations or along the road. The section of the road from the Sibundoy valley to Mocoa (the area comprised today by the Forest Reserve) seems to have been an exception, a situation associated with the rugged topography of the area. For instance, in June 1912, a few months after this section had been concluded, the Inspector sent from Bogotá to examine the works observed that in most of this section the road crossed "forests totally virgin and deserted, through the cliffs and slopes of the cordillera". This situation, however, changed noticeably from the actual site of Campucana to the town capital, where the Inspector found "arable lands of barely fair quality, all claimed as baldíos, and all granted provisionally by the township of Mocoa".[39]

[37] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico", Tomo IV, Anexo predial Vereda Campucana.
[38] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico", Tomo III, 49.
[39] Rufino Gutiérrez to Ministry of Public Works, 24 June 1912, AGN, MOP, Vol.1407, fols.579-582, fol. 581.

Although Campucana was then a mere “paraje” (stopping place) on the road and the origins of the actual vereda date from more than two decades later, the Inspector’s observation sheds light on the early land speculation in the area. On the other hand, government regulations regarding baldíos were at the time rather vague and unclear, and it is difficult to establish how many of those land grants survived or eventually translated into title deeds. The eldest inhabitants of the vereda, for their part, locate the arrival of the first settlers in the mid 1930s and 1940s, and the oldest land titles and documents found by the PBMAS date from this period.

As in the other surrounding veredas, Campucana’s first settlers were mostly families from Nariño in the search of cheap or vacant lands, already scarce in the Sibundoy valley. Yet, what made these lands attractive was not only the perspective of claiming them as baldíos but its abundance of precious woods, a highly valued product which for several decades became the main means of livelihood of the area. The proximity of such lands to the Capuchin road, still in use at the time and kept up by the settlers themselves, facilitated the access to timber, transported by mules to Mocoa and San Francisco.

The extraction of timber in Campucana, an activity that continues to play an important role in the economy of the vereda, even though it constitutes a practice long deemed illegal, is vital to understand its complex land tenure system. Part of this complexity has to do with the simple fact that land, especially in the early days of the vereda when baldíos were still abundant, was valued not so much in terms of size but the amount of timber it contained, and above all its access. This aspect is mirrored in the old land deeds and documents, which rarely register areas but instead emphasise the proximity of the lands to the road and in some cases mention existence of timber. At the same time, most of these lands were not enclosed and its borders were frequently trochas (footpaths), creeks, trees, stones, and other landmarks largely unintelligible to outsiders. The following description of a land plot coming from a private document offers a good example of this situation. The document, a notarised contract formalising the sale of a land plot in the site of “El Conejo” -a creek that runs through Campucana- in August 1955, does not register the plot’s area or name but instead contains the following detailed description of its borders:

> To the East, it borders with the bridle path that goes to San Francisco, this side measures eighty (80) metres; to the North, in West direction, borders with the land of Hermógenes Nupán, a small creek upwards, until finding a guava tree and a plant of chontaduro,[40] this side measures seventy two metres; from this landmark it goes South, bordering with the same Hermógenes Nupán, until finding a *huecadita*[41], this line measuring fifteen metres (15); from this landmark in the same West flank, goes back to the East until it finds a barbasco tree,[42] this line (sic) twenty metres (20); from here, forming a set square, it goes South until its finds a *ojo de aguas vivas,*[43] this line measuring thirty (30) metres; from this landmark, in the West flank, heads again to the East, following the stream of the *ojo de agua* mentioned above, bordering with lands of Benedicto Nupán, until it gets again to the above quoted road to San Francisco, point of departure, shore of the waters above referred.[44]

According to the seller's version recorded in the same document, this land plot was a baldío inherited from his father, and it is highly likely that it would be later granted by the government to the current or future buyer. In such a case, difficult to determine as the document does not seem to be connected to any land deed included in the study, it would eventually become a property with title deeds, containing more "legible" data such as name, area and cadastral plan. However, even considering this to be the case it is predictable that this "legibility" would be rather ephemeral, as it is also very likely that the same land plot would be later subjected to partial sales and other transactions with private document, a common practice in the vereda. This illegibility pattern, on the other hand, only accounts for a small part of the tenure practices in the vereda. Beyond documents and deeds, there is a multitude of the so-called "arreglos de palabra" (verbal agreements) through which lands are regularly appropriated, traded, inherited, rented, etc. A typical example of these agreements constitutes the tenure of lands which people in the vereda call "baldíos", though in practice are non-alienable lands for different reasons (e.g. they are within the limits of the Forest Reserve of its surrounding areas). These lands are regularly the more remote or less accessible ones, for the most part uninhabited or only sporadically occupied. Still, and even though they lack any kind of document, they all have "owners".

[40] *Bactris gasipaes*, local palm.
[41] Small ditch
[42] Generic name for plants containing poisonous chemical compounds commonly used for fishing.
[43] Natural water source (emphasis added).
[44] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico", Tomo IV, Anexo predial Vereda Campucana, n.p.

In order to illustrate this point better, let us describe a farm from the vereda. Originally a proper baldío, this farm was granted in 1982 to José Perez[45], its current owner, after having occupied it for more than ten years. It has an extension of 25 hectares, somewhat above the average size for the vereda, and the PBMAS "Legal Diagnosis" classified it as a land plot in "absolute ownership". Differently to most farms, it keeps its original size and does not register total or partial sales. For several years -during which José made a living from the extraction of timber- it remained unfenced, its borders with the neighbouring farms consisting of landmarks such as those mentioned above; nowadays, however, as he keeps a few cattle, it is partially fenced with barbed wire. The plot is divided as follows: 2.5 hectares in coffee crops (the main cash crop) mixed with staple crops (manioc, plantain, citrus trees), 5 hectares in pasture lands, and 8 hectares of "rastrojo".[46] The rest of it, about 10 hectares, consists of the so-called "monte" (secondary forests too steep to be farmed but considered an important source of different timber and non-timber products).

The above description provides a basic picture of the baldío granted by the government to José. In practice, nevertheless, José's farm extends far beyond the 25 hectares he legally owns or that are registered in the title deeds. The reason is basically that the farm's southern boundary borders with an extensive area of forests, whose main access is through the same farm. It is from this forest, whose area José estimates at about 100 hectares, that he extracted cedar, cumin and other precious woods for more than three decades. However, as José himself acknowledges, the basis of "ownership" in this case is, if not ambiguous, contingent at least. Thus, while he assures that the only "legitimate owner" of this forest is the state, he also argues that as long as the state does not claim it, it will continue to "belong" to him.

Even nowadays, when José no longer logs timber, he considers himself "too old for such a hazardous job" and the precious wood trees left are too inaccessible, his farm continues to be the main "gateway" to the forest and anyone wishing to enter it needs his permission.

[45] The names of the persons quoted in this section appear with pseudonyms.
[46] Secondary-growth forest or woods resulting from lands cultivated in former times, which are left in fallow for 2-3 years before being cultivated again.

Yet, it would be erroneous to think that his "ownership" of this forest is based solely on the fact that he controls its access. Actually, what ultimately defines "ownership" here, as in many other informal land tenure arrangements, is the fact that, despite lacking any written proof of property or possession, it is acknowledged and respected by the other inhabitants of the vereda. In other words, "ownership" based on "access" constitutes here one of the many different customary norms that together sustain and regulate the life of the vereda.

A central aspect of those norms and the infinite arrangements stemming from them is that, while they are perfectly legible in the eyes of the vereda's inhabitants, they remain largely invisible or indecipherable in the eyes of the state. The expression of frustration from one of the project's professional technicians dealing with the issue of clarification of land tenure within the Reserve is quite telling in this regard. In explaining to me the hardships and conflicts he and his team had been facing in the process, he said:

> How can I, as State, *sanear*[47] an area that you, as Colono, claim that you have been making use of for 20 or 10 years, but it does not have a title, nor a contract of sale, nor anything but you say you bought it from someone else for two hundred pesos 20 years ago? For the fact is that all the lands within the Reserve have owners. And one goes and looks and they say "this belongs to that person because there is this *trocha* that goes in there and it was built by that same person", or "this land right there belongs to him because he came here first and logged some timber and opened some trochas so this belongs to him". These actions have created certain forms of understanding and certain land tenure agreements among people. But then what does this mean for Mr. State and Mr. Government when they go and try to clean this up? It means that there is going to be a conflict.[48]

At first glance, this observation may suggest that "state" or "government" and "community" stand as two separate and in many ways antagonistic orders, the latter governed by custom and the former by law. Yet, as it was previously argued, this is far from being the case. Certainly, many of the people's informal land tenure arrangements cannot be isolated from the state practices. Sometimes, they take place in response to the latter's coercive powers. This is the case, for example, of land transactions through private documents or the undervaluing of land in public deeds as a way to avoid land taxes, a widespread practice in

[47] "Sanear" is a term which in the context of land tenure means the clarification and cleaning up of irregular or clouded land titles.
[48] Personal interview, Mocoa, July 8th, 2010.

the vereda. Still, at other times, those arrangements may also result from or reflect people's strategies to take advantage of government policies. An example of this, worth describing in some detail, is the "Programa Familias Guardabosques" (Forest Ranger Families Programme, PFGB onwards), a government-run conditional cash transfer programme that is well remembered in Campucana.

PFGB was launched by President Uribe in 2003, and was essentially aimed at eradicating illicit coca crops in the country, targeting rural populations that were directly involved in coca farming or, as in the case of Campucana, were considered to be at risk.[49] During Uribe's two terms (2002-2010), PGBT reached a considerable part of the Putumayo, at the time one of the country's provinces with highest presence of coca crops.[50]

PGBT arrived in Campucana on July 2006, during the programme's Phase III, and extended for three years. Although the influence of coca crops in the area was negligible if compared with other parts of the region,[51] the programme generated big expectations in the vereda, mostly due to the money incentive. This consisted of a bi-monthly subsidy of $600,000 pesos (approx. US$300), 65% in cash and 35% as a "saving" to be withdrawn at the end of the programme and invested in a "productive sustainable project" (popular ones in the vereda included coffee, cattle, poultry, and sugar cane). As for the eligibility requirements, apart from the commitment to not growing coca, they consisted basically of having family, being a household head, and demonstrating ownership or possession of a farm with an extension of at least two hectares.

Not surprisingly, everyone in the vereda wanted to be a beneficiary and those who were not eligible resorted to all kinds of stratagems to fulfil the programme requirements. Isabel, a community leader from the vereda who worked as programme overseer, recounted to me some of them: widows who "hired" partners for a percentage of the subsidy, singles

[49] For a general description of PFGB see "Informe ejecutivo sobre el seguimiento a los programas de Familias Guardabosques y Proyectos Productivos", UNODC, Acción Social, Bogotá, 2007, accessed December 10, 2010, ftp://190.144.33.2/UNODC/informeejecutivo.pdf
[50] UNODC, *Colombia. Monitoreo de Cultivos de Coca* (Bogotá: UNODC, Gobierno de Colombia, 2008), 13.
[51] See "Cultivos de Coca. Estadísticas Muncipales. Censo 2006", UNODC, Gobierno de Colombia, 75-77, accessed December 10, 2012, ftp://190.144.33.2/UNODC/municipios_2006.pdf

who arranged fictitious marital unions overnight to pass themselves as couples, and others who temporarily "rented" children. As these "special" cases were first internally evaluated by the Junta de Acción Comunal (the vereda's community board, responsible for reporting to the programme office in Mocoa), conflicts regarding who should or shouldn't get its support were common. Furthermore, those who were refused by the Junta often opted to act without its consent, and threats to the community overseers to cover them up were not infrequent.

Stratagems to comply with the requirement of land ownership/possession proliferated as well. The deeds and documents gathered by the PBMAS "Legal Diagnosis" (carried out at the time the programme was being implemented) represent an important source in this respect.[52] During 2005 and 2006, and especially in the months preceding the arrival of the programme to the vereda, the increase of both legal and informal land transactions (extra-judicial statements declaring possession of baldíos, land donations, total or partial sales of lands with legal titles through private documents, usually among family members) is quite noticeable. The PBMAS makes no mention to the possible relation between those transactions and the PFGB, and since land documents were to be supplied by people, it is more than likely that there were many others impossible to trace. Isabel, for instance, mentioned that with the arrival of the programme "the documents soared" in the vereda, and recalled different cases: a person who owned a farm exceeding the 2 hectares required by the programme and had "lent" land parcels (through notarised contracts of sale) in exchange for a fraction of the subsidy; an extended family living under the same roof who split their farm in various pieces and built separate homes to appear as individual owners; a married couple who divorced and split both the farm and the children so each of them could present themselves as head of household and receive two subsidies.

But Isabel's stories drew attention not only to the multiplication of informal arrangements to enter PFGB. More relevant was how many of these arrangements, despite their fictitious and provisional nature, ended up having real effects. Her own experience with the

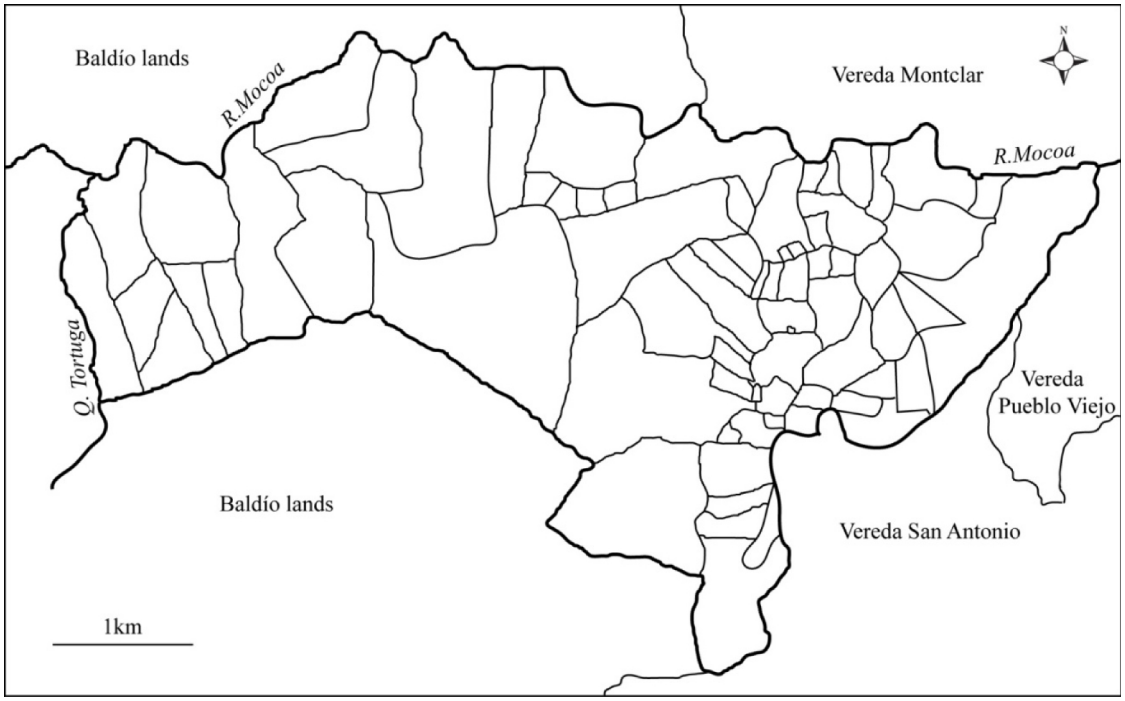
[52] INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico," Tomo IV, Anexo predial Vereda Campucana.

programme provides a telling example in this respect. Her father, in order for all his sons to be eligible, "issued" private documents (through contracts of partial sale of his own farm) to those who did not own land. Still, he was emphatic and told everyone that such documents were only for them to obtain the PFGB benefits, for his will was to eventually divide his farm in equal parts among all his sons. Yet he died months before the PFGB came to an end and when this happened, by the end of 2009, a long dispute arose among brothers concerning the documents in question. According to Isabel, the main source of the conflict, still unsettled, was that the four brothers who had been given documents (this was not her case since she was married and owned a land plot prior to the arrival of PFGB) had refused to surrender them, alleging that the old man had given the land to them as a gift, and thus argued they were its "legitimate owners".

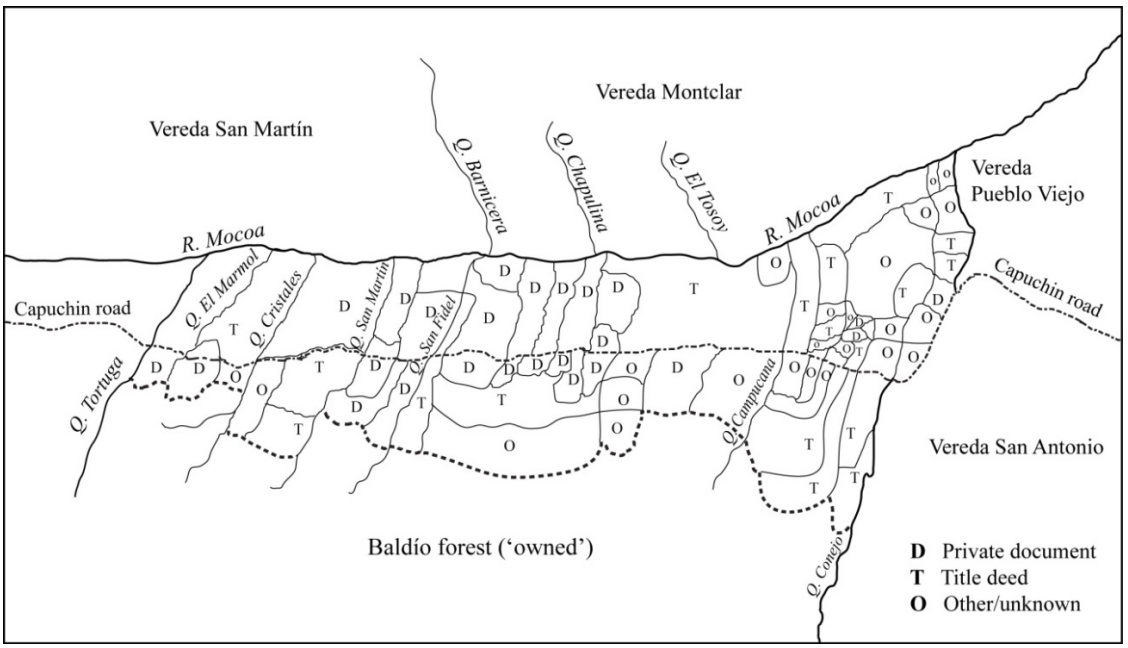
Like Isabel's, there are several other stories of land deals and agreements related to the PFGB that ended up altering the existing land tenure arrangements. In some cases these alterations resulted from verbal agreements broken by conflicts. In others, they were just consequence of provisional arrangements that became permanent, or even of real land transactions made with the subsidy money. A significant aspect of such arrangements is that they brought more complexity to the veredas' already intricate land tenure system, to the point they *projected* a dual image of "community" and" "government" or "state" as two totally detached and dichotomous orders. In the remaining part of the chapter, I would like to emphasise this aspect by contrasting two cadastral maps of Campucana. In doing so, however, my primary aim is not use the maps as further evidence to highlight this dichotomy or gap, but rather to deconstruct them in order to draw attention again on the multiple imbrications and entanglements between the spatial and social orders they seek to capture.

Entangled maps

Map 10. Campucana's official cadastral map (2004)[53]



Map 11. Campucana's peasant cadastral map (2010)[54]



[53] Elaborated by the author. Cartographic base: IGAC National Cadastral System, map sheet ID number 430-II-C and 430-II-D (original scale 1:25000).

[54] Elaborated by Humberto Tobar. Digitally traced by the author.

The maps displayed above, as indicated by their titles, correspond to official (government) and peasant's[55] cadastral maps of the vereda Campucana. Apart from a very few perceptible similarities (a bigger concentration of land plots in their right corners, a partial correspondence in the location of neighbouring veredas), the two maps have little in common: the location, size and shape of land plots hardly match, the cadastral and geographical "data" displayed on each of them is of a different sort, part of the vereda's adjacent areas are identified differently, and the contours of the vereda are markedly dissimilar. Even though these discrepancies might largely reflect the aforementioned gap between the state's "norm" and the people's "practice", they are not confined to this gap. Another important factor is the different ways in which peasant and state project or translate "reality" from ground to paper.

The first map (map 10) is a copy of the official or state cadastral plan of the area comprised by Campucana taken from the IGAC's National Cadastral System, the government system that gathers together the cadastral information at a national level. There are various reliability and accuracy issues that could be mentioned in relation to this map. In first place, the cadastral information is outdated. Although in theory the national cadastre has to be updated every five years, the data displayed in this map is from 2004, and in 2011 the upgrading process had not yet initiated in the Mocoa area. This means that all the formal land transactions (through title deeds) which took place since that year, including those examined in the PBMAS "Legal Diagnosis", are not shown in the map.

More strikingly, this map still shows as "baldío lands" part of the areas surrounding the vereda, areas which according to the PBMAS not only fall within the Forest Reserve created in 1984, but were actually granted by the INCODER[56] prior to and after this year. On the other hand, the borders of the vereda displayed on the map provided to IGAC by the

[55] The inhabitants of the Forest Reserve often identify themselves as peasants and the use of the term in this section must be understood in this context rather than as a conceptual category applied by the author to this population.

[56] The INCODER replaced the INCORA (Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform), the government land-reform agency.

municipality, only partially correspond with the actual or "real" borders recognised by its inhabitants. This situation is not so marked in areas where boundaries are fixed by natural landmarks which change little over time as in those where limits are imaginary lines, generally defined by the borders of the land plots themselves. These boundaries are seldom static and change sporadically, mainly as the result of adjudication of lands beyond the vereda's current boundary or land transactions of bordering lands (e.g. when someone from the vereda sells or buys a land parcel bordering with another vereda).

Although an updated version of Campucana's state cadastral map would overcome most of the aforesaid issues, this new map would still be far from resembling the peasant's cadastral map. The reason, as previously noted, has to do not just with the peasants' myriad informal and semi-legal practices escaping the sight of the official surveyor, but a fundamentally different process of "map-making". In order to illustrate this point further, it is worth describing in some detail the peasant cadastral map (map 11).

This map is copy of a handmade map drawn by Humberto Tobar, an inhabitant of Campucana. Humberto was around 60 by the time I met him and was one of the people with more knowledge of the area. He had lived in the vereda for 42 years and, as most men of his generation, had made a living mostly off timber and other extractive and agricultural activities. However, for many years he had also worked sporadically as a "trochero" (trail opener) in the numerous road-engineering studies undertaken since the early 1980s. Thus, he knew the Forest Reserve inch by inch and could talk endlessly about its intricate tenure patterns, including the history of most of the "fincas" (farms). It was listening to his minute descriptions that I eventually proposed to hire him as cartographer, so he might put some of his "trochero" knowledge on paper. The task, we soon found out, proved far more complicated than initially envisaged.

As the main purpose of the exercise was to contrast the official cadastral plan of Campucana with Humberto's map, I provided him with an enlarged copy of the IGAC's map and suggested that he drew on top of it using a distinctive colour. Although the basic idea was to overwrite the original plan in order to highlight similarities and differences, it proved

totally fruitless. Not only did the cadastral plan seem totally alien to Humberto, but its lack of basic geographical data made it impossible for him to orientate himself on the map. Consequently, we decided to try again with a physical map of the area showing rivers and contour lines. This time Umberto could roughly locate the vereda following some its natural boundaries shown in the map, primarily the Mocoa River. However, he again found the conventions unfamiliar, and despite turning the map upside down several times, he could simply not find his way on it.

After two failed attempts, it seemed clear it was impossible for Humberto to "find himself" on any official map. Yet we agreed to make a third and last attempt. A few days later, I came back with a couple of large sheets of blank paper for him to start a new map from scratch. It took him some time to think of how to start, but eventually he began by drawing two horizontal parallel-irregular lines across the paper, which he identified as the Mocoa River and the Capuchin road. Subsequently, he traced a series of perpendicular lines representing the main tributary creeks of the Mocoa River. Once he had established these landmarks and natural boundaries, the task of mapping the layout of the vereda and the land parcels seemed far easier. It was easy to see that he had found his way on the map, and while he drew it was almost as if he had again assumed his role of "trochero" and had embarked himself in an imaginary journey through the vereda. Here and there he spotted an old tree or abandoned path, located a farm and introduced its tenants or tenure "status" (e.g. private document, title, other), pointed at a baldío forest and named its "owner", and so on. And the more pieces he put together, the more intricate the map became, to the point that at the end it resembled an entangled puzzle of names, landmarks and intertwined lines and arrows.

The figure displayed here is a simplified or "readable" version of the original map, showing only a few conventions depicting some basic features of Campucana's land tenure system according to Humberto. We could not say this map is more "accurate" than the official cadastral plan, at least if we stick to the strict definition of the term. For instance, it does not have a scale, the boundary and landmark lines are arbitrary strokes rather than topographic projections, and the shape of land polygons are more graphic than realistic.

Yet, if we measure cartographic accuracy not as the degree in which the features on the map conform to facts on the ground but the extent in which the map discloses the *nature* of such facts, we could then argue that Humberto's map is more accurate than the state map.

Just to provide an example of this sense of accuracy, let us consider the way in which the southern boundary of the vereda is represented in both maps. In the IGAC's plan, this boundary is signalled by a neat line defined by the legal limits of those land plots bordering with the area classified as "baldío lands". Despite the expected margin of error in measurement and the fact that it is outdated, this boundary line could be said to be a fair projection of the vereda's southern border –that is, so long as we assume that the legal limits of the land plots conform to their actual ones. Yet, as previously noted, this is rarely the case, particularly in areas where land parcels border with baldío lands such as the farm described in the previous section. This gulf between actual and legal or official boundaries is, in contrast, clearly expressed in Humberto's map. In this map, there is no such thing as a border line but just an irregular and dotted trace whose purpose is precisely to stress the undefined, porous, and shifting nature of boundaries. Accuracy, in this case, is then not an effect of measurement but, conversely, the art of expressing the incommensurability of certain facts on the ground.

"The art of being governed"

Even if we translate or decode the state and Humberto's maps in order to render them comparable, as it has been attempted in the previous section, the fact remains that they are highly incompatible. The greatest proof of this is perhaps that the IGAC's cadastral plan is as illegible to Humberto as his own map would be indecipherable and useless to the cadastral surveyor. If we transfer this mutual indecipherability from the maps to the spatial orders they seek to represent, one would be highly tempted to conclude that these orders are equally incompatible: a "state space" governed panoptic transparency and control, and a "non-state space" dominated by messy and intricate practices hampering, subverting and evading such transparency and control.

James Scott, who has extensively explored the subject of legibility in the context of state formation, has stressed the crucial importance of such spatial dualisms to understand dynamics of domination of and resistance in the colonial and postcolonial world. In a recent work, suggestively titled "The art of not being governed", he has looked closely at this dualism in the specific context of upland Southeast Asia, focusing especially on the populations that have successfully managed to remain "stateless" for two millennia. This book can be read in many ways as the counter story of *Seeing like a State* introduced earlier in the chapter, for its main concern is not about the state's ruthless technologies of legibility but the multiple elements and practices (geography, agricultural techniques and strength of oral traditions, among others) defying domination and control and thus facilitating the existence and survival of "non-state" spaces. More importantly, he insists that his study is not solely concerned with a particular region or people and is more generally conceived as a "fragment of what might be properly considered a global history of populations trying to avoid, or having been extruded by, the state".[57]

Scott's call for and contribution to a global history of state avoidance, which he encourages by mentioning similar stories of other peripheral regions and populations world-wide, is significant, especially as it seeks to challenge hegemonic narratives that conceive state-making processes as the inexorable expansion of "civilised" centres over "savage" frontiers. However, this view poses serious limitations to the study of spaces where dynamics of domination, subversion or resistance cannot be isolated but rather coexist and are deeply intertwined. This is case of the Putumayo, which as I have argued throughout cannot be conceived as a "non-state space" but rather a space whose inclusion to the state has historically been dependent on a series of exclusionary practices. Accordingly, it has been suggested that we cannot assume that "state" and "frontier" exist as detached and homogeneous realms or spaces, the former being synonymous with domination and the latter with evasion or resistance. On the contrary, I have insisted that in order to fully understand how domination, resistance, subversion and, more broadly, hegemony works,

[57] James Scott, *The art of not being governed. An anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 328.

we have to account for the multiple entanglements, encounters and interactions through which both state and frontier have been discursively and materially constructed.

In this chapter, I have sought to explore these interactions and encounters within the context of the road project, specifically through the relationship between legibility and land tenure practices associated to it. Firstly, I highlighted the relationship between the project's goal of legibility and the broader governmental rationale of fostering state presence and control in the region. This rationale cannot be isolated from the broader historical geography of state and frontier explored in the preceding chapters, and particularly from the relation of *inclusive exclusion* shaping this historical geography. A clear example of this relationship constitutes the project's claims to "participation" and "inclusion" of local communities, which in practice revealed how certain forms of knowledge were privileged and others subordinated or simply excluded.

Secondly, it was illustrated how the project's aim of legibility, at least in what concerns the issue of land tenure situation on its area of direct influence, largely failed. Although this failure was not solely a consequence of the project's logic and rather exposed the state's structural illegibility problems in the area, it was noted how the same logic contributed to exacerbate these problems. Illegibility, on the other hand, was not just a "state" or "project" *effect*, but also a *condition* deeply rooted in a multitude of everyday land tenure arrangements and tactics. As was described in the section on the vereda Campucana, these arrangements and tactics were largely part of people's customary norms regulating the tenure and use of land. In many cases, however, they took place as a way of avoiding taxes or with the purpose of appropriating non-alienable lands. Still, at other times, as in the case of the PFGB, they were part of people's manoeuvres to take advantage of government subsidies, or even resulted from family and neighbour conflicts occurring in the course of the programme.

As it was argued, a significant element of these arrangements is that while remaining legible in the eyes of the community, they largely escape the panoptic gaze of the state. But their crucial aspect is that they do not exist outside the state, let alone mirror a "non-state"

space. In other words, whether they respond to surveillance or coercive policies or result from strategies or manoeuvres to take advantage of government schemes, the fact is that they were not "external" to them. Rather, they resemble de Certeau's "tactics", or those innumerable procedures which defy or subvert disciplinary power and yet are carried out by "groups or individuals already caught in the nets of "discipline"".[58] Put in a somewhat different way and departing from Scott's somewhat rigid divide between domination and resistance, these everyday arrangements and customary practices, though informal or extralegal in nature, not so much embody "the art of not being governed" as "the art of being governed". If we manage to grasp this subtle but important distinction, then we might be able to see both Campucana's state and peasant maps not as the dichotomous image of two irreconcilable spatial and social orders but as a highly "accurate" representation of the complex and dynamic articulations and linkages between frontier and state.

[58] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), xiv-xv.

Chapter 6
The politics of the displaced

In the preceding chapters, I introduced a wide range of characters who in different ways relate to the road. Together, these characters could be conceived or read as many different fragments and voices, past and present, of the same story. My aim throughout the research, however, has not been to assemble those voices and fragments into a single narrative of the road, but to place them in the much broader historical geography of state and frontier. This historical geography, I have argued, has been primarily shaped by a relation of *inclusive exclusion* or a relation where the assimilation or incorporation of the frontier to the spatial and political order of the state has historically depended on its exclusion from the imaginary order of the nation. In doing so, I have attempted to present the road's many characters - from early twentieth century statesmen and missionaries to contemporary peasants- not as isolated subjects or individuals but as interrelated embodiments or expressions of this relation.

In the first chapter, I sought to depict the ways in which the hegemonic discourses and practices of the state have been crafted and embedded *in* time and *through* space. In this manner, and especially through the figure of the *creole pioneer*, I tried to look at one end of the wide spectrum of characters comprising such relations. In this chapter I would like to consider the other end of this spectrum by focusing on the figure of the *displaced person*.[1]

[1] The Colombian law (Law 387 of 1997, Art.1) defines the displaced person as: "Any person who has been forced to migrate within the national territory, abandoning his place of residence or customary economic activities, because his life, physical integrity, personal freedom or safety have been violated or are directly threatened as a result of any of the following situations: internal armed conflict, civil tension and disturbances, general violence, massive Human Rights violations, infringement of International Humanitarian Law, or other circumstances arising from the foregoing situations that drastically disturb or could drastically disturb the public order". Accessed March 10, 2013,
http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Projects/idp/Colombia_Law387_1997_Eng.PDF

Specifically, I seek to describe the turbulent resettlement process of a displaced community[2] illegally occupying a segment of the road project's area on the outskirts of Mocoa. Through an ethnographic description of the origins and development of this process, I would like to lay emphasis on the multiple practices, strategies and actions through which the displaced struggle to overcome their condition of "rightlessness", as well as to reflect on both the potential and limits inherent to this struggle. In doing so, I will draw attention to how the relation of *inclusive exclusion* manifests in the everyday lives of the displaced peoples, as well as the different ways through which they make sense of and challenge it.

The displaced

The number of internally displaced people in Colombia as a result of the ongoing armed conflict is estimated at about 4 million by the government and 5.4 million according to non-governmental sources,[3] the largest internally displaced population in the world.[4] These numbers, accounting for roughly 8.5 and 11.4% of the country's population, give an idea of the dramatic effects of decades of violent conflict. Forced displacement constitutes a social and human tragedy that defies easy analysis and is difficult to grasp through figures alone. Uprooting, loss of residence, severing of community and family ties, marginality and stigmatisation, are just some of the conditions most frequently described in relation to displaced people that are difficult to describe, let alone measure.[5]

At the centre of the political and academic debate concerning displaced people is the issue of rights. This issue partly stems from the simple fact that displacement always poses a serious threat to or implies a loss of basic rights such as work, shelter, health, and security.

[2] "Community" is the term often used by members of the group of displaced people I studied to refer to themselves, a common term in the practice of government officials, NGOs and displacees. I do not dwell into the implications of this concept, but will be specifying certain meanings of it further down.

[3] Codhes "Desplazamiento creciente y crisis humanitaria invisibilizada", *Boletín de la Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento*, No. 79, 2012, accessed March 14, 2013, http://www.acnur.org/t3/uploads/media/CODHES_Informa_79_Desplazamiento_creciente_y_crisis_humanitaria_invisibilizada_Marzo_2012.pdf?view=1

[4] According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre's 2011 Global Overview, accessed August 16, 2013, http://www.internal-displacement.org/publications/global-overview-2011

[5] The literature on internal displacement in Colombia is very extensive. For a partial list of publications on the subject see http://www.acnur.org/paginas/index.php?id_pag=6533

In theory, the government has the constitutional obligation to restore and protect such rights, and Colombia is certainly known for having one of the most advanced legislative frameworks in the world in relation to internally displaced populations. However, the wide gap between legislation and practice or political rhetoric and commitment is often cited in the literature as one of the main problems accounting for the displaced peoples' "rightless" condition.[6] This situation, on the other hand, has been publicly acknowledged by the country's Constitutional Court, which at various occasions has declared as "unconstitutional" the state's prolonged inability or unwillingness to guarantee the rights of the displaced population.[7]

Although the subject of rights has brought attention to the highly vulnerable situation of the displaced, less attention has been given to the ways in which this issue transcends the particular condition of forced displacement. Daniel Pécaut has discussed this specific subject by analysing the phenomena of forced displacement in the long history of violence in the country.[8] Drawing on Arendt's account of European refugees in the context of fascism and World War II, Pécaut reflects on the case of the Colombian displaced population around the three dimensions of displacement identified by Arendt: the loss of "residence", implying not only loss of domicile and property but "social texture" (e.g. community and family ties); displacement not as consequence of individual or collective political or ideological standings but accidental or "natural" reasons (e.g. belonging to or having being born in the "wrong"

[6] See, amongst others: Codhes 2012, "Desplazamiento creciente"…; David Durán et.al, *Desplazamiento forzado en Colombia. Derechos, acceso a la justicia y reparaciones*, ACNUR, CEDHUL, Generalitat Valenciana (Colombia: Futura Impresores, 2007); Nora Segura, "Colombia: A New Century, an Old War, and More Internal Displacement", *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol.14, no.1 (2002): 107-126; Jennifer Easterday, "Litigation or Legislation: Protecting the rights of internally displaced persons In Colombia", unpublished paper, 2008, accessed, March 2, 2012, http://works.bepress.com/jennifer_easterday/1. For a gender perspective on the relationship between displacement and rights, see Donny Merteens and Margarita Zambrano "Citizenship Deferred: The Politics of Victimhood, Land Restitution and Gender Justice in the Colombian (Post?) Conflict", *The International Journal of Transitional Justice*, Vol. 4 (2010), 189–206.

[7] Corte Constitucional, 2004. Sentencia T025/04, accessed March 3, 2013, http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2004/t-025-04.htm; Corte Constitucional, 2009. Auto 008/09, accessed March 3, 2013, http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/RELATORIA/Autos/2009/A008-09.htm

[8] Daniel Pécaut, "The *Loss of Rights*, the meaning of experience, and social Connection: A Consideration of the internally displaced in Colombia", *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol.14, no.1 (2000): 89-105.

class, race or place); and loss of political and civil rights resulting from a condition of "statelessness" (loss of membership to a national political community).[9]

According to Pécaut, the Colombian internally displaced largely fits within Arendt's threefold condition of the European refugee. However, he emphasises that the former, though "rightless", cannot be considered a "stateless" person in the strict sense of the term or the lack of membership to a nation state. Still, he suggests that if this membership be regarded in effective rather than just formal terms, then the Colombian displaced resembles a "stateless" person. This distinction, otherwise expressed as the gap between nominal and actual citizenship, is crucial in Pécaut's argument, as it is here that the "rightless" status of the displaced is revealed not as a temporary condition related to the situation of displacement, but as a permanent reality inscribed in the country's long history of violence. Hence Pécaut's statement that, in Colombia, displacement "is not simply a life episode, but the living out of a near permanent social condition".[10]

Pécaut's analysis is highly relevant to the discussion on forced displacement, especially as it shifts the debate from the *conjunctural* "rightless" status of the displaced person to the *structural* relationship between state and society in a context of prolonged political and social conflict.[11] However, the author's approach to this relationship is fundamentally different to the one I have taken throughout the text. Pécaut's argument, well-established within the tradition of violence studies, broadly maintains that this relation has been marked by a "precarious" state that has historically "coexisted" with private or extra-legal powers, or whose power vacuum in large areas of the country has been "filled" by the latter.[12] Thus, for Pécaut, the real tragedy of the displaced is not that of a people rendered "rightless" by the violent act of displacement, but that of a large population inhabiting a

[9] For Arendt's original discussion on these dimensions of displacement see Hannah Arendt, *The origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), 266-298.
[10] Pécaut, "The *Loss of Rights*", 93.
[11] In this respect see also Victoria Sanford, "Contesting displacement in Colombia. Citizenship and state sovereignty at the margins", in Das and Poole, eds., *Anthropology,* 253-277.
[12] For a general review of Pécaut's argument on the "precarious state" see González *et.al*., *Violencia Política,* 222-226; Bolívar, *Violencia política y formación del estado,* 43-46.

"fragmented territory" whose membership or connection to the state has been in many respects "a fiction in the face of the dominance of personal networks of power".[13]

Like Pécaut, I think it is essential to recognise that the "rightless" condition of the displaced transcends the contingent situation of forced displacement. Yet, unlike Pécaut, I don't think this condition can be explained in terms of a situation of *exclusion* from the state -no matter if this exclusion is expressed in geographical, political or symbolic terms. Rather, I would like to suggest that the tragedy of the displaced, a tragedy that resembles or epitomises in many respects the drama of the frontier, is not the tragedy of those excluded *from* the state but that of those whose relation *with* the state has been one of *inclusive exclusion*. The point I want to emphasise here is that this distinction between *exclusion* and *inclusion by means of exclusion* is vital to grasp the relation between displaced peoples and the state in Colombia.

In developing this point, I will draw upon Partha Chatterjee's notion of "political society", a concept he uses to explore and question the relations between state and society in the postcolonial world.[14] Although this concept of "political society" is not novel and has been used in other contexts, most notably perhaps in Gramsci's understanding of hegemony,[15] Chatterjee recreates it through his critique of universal Western notions of the state and civil society. These notions, recalls Chatterjee, were grounded in a modern ideal of democracy, where the affiliation to the state was assumed as a universal guarantee of citizenship or a process that automatically turned individuals set apart by race or class into equal citizens as bearers of rights. In most of the world, however, and particularly outside the West, this ideal seldom matches the actual nature of the state and democracy, since the actual domain of civil society is confined to a fairly small segment of the population. The vast majority of people, in contrast, can hardly be considered "proper members of civil society" or "right-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution"; and yet, adds Chatterjee, "it is not as though they are outside the reach of the state or even excluded

[13] Pécaut, "The *Loss of Rights",* 94.
[14] Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed. Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
[15] Gramsci, *Notebooks*, 206-276.

from the domain of politics".[16] Thus, what actually differentiates these "populations" from the small minority of "citizens" is not their condition of exclusion or inclusion *from* the state, but the way in which they *relate* to it: a relation that is defined not by the conventional rules of democracy, as in the case of "real" citizens, but by the messy and often conflictive terrain of politics.

This particular relation, which ultimately defines the essence of "political society", has two main intertwined facets or dimensions. The first tells about how governments deal with or aim to control and regulate those who under the eyes of the state are seen as subjects or populations rather than citizens. This facet encompasses the sphere of governmentality. The second facet is about what Chatterjee calls "the politics of the governed", and has to do with the infinite array of informal practices through which these same subjects or populations claim their status as citizens. The illegal or paralegal character of such practices is of great relevance within the meaning of "political society", for it is this character that unveils and exposes the fictitious nature of universal citizenship under the constitution of the modern state. But the critical point of "political society" is not, Chatterjee reminds us, how it exposes this fiction but the fact that the fiction "must be recognised and dealt with".[17] In other words, as long as the utopic condition of universal citizenship has to be maintained, those practices, though existing outside the formal rules of "civil society", acquire a *legitimate* or widely accepted character in "political society".

These facets of "political society" -facets that as Chatterjee argues constitute not deviations of modernity but one of their most distinctive features in most of the world-, are, I think, crucial to grasp the everyday realities and politics of the displaced peoples both in the particular case addressed here and in Colombia in general. The first facet is highly illustrative of the process through which the displaced have entered the realm of official discourse and been constructed as a specific object of government intervention. This is a subject that has

[16] Chatterjee, *The Politics,* 38
[17] Chatterjee, *The Politics,* 74.

been well addressed in the literature,[18] and which I have already discussed in the broader context of state making practices in the frontier. Here, my primary concern is with the second facet, for two main reasons. Firstly, I consider it provides a suitable theoretical and ethnographic framework to discuss and reflect on the sort of strategies, characters, events and conflicts around the resettlement process analysed here, as well as the role played by the road within it. Secondly, and in doing so, I think it allows for reflection on both the possibilities, limits, and challenges faced by those who, like the displaced peoples, inhabit a frontier condition and, as such, have been historically and spatially assimilated to the order of the state through a relation of *inclusive exclusion*.

The making of a community

The story of Guaduales is in many ways the story of one of the many displaced settlements that originated as result of the war in the country's rural areas. It goes back to the early 2000s, when the escalation of the conflict between the government, the paramilitary and the guerrilla, together with the increase of aerial fumigation of coca crops in the region, massively increased the exodus of peasant families to urban centres both within the Putumayo and to other parts of the country. In that single year, 1,397 displaced persons were reported to have arrived in Mocoa, which rapidly became the main recipient of displaced population in the department, to the point that three years later it was estimated that the displaced comprised more than a third of the town's total population.[19] Although most of these displaced arrived initially to family or friends' homes or rented houses in the marginal neighbourhoods of the city, many established or moved to already existing informal settlements which began to spread at the outskirts of town.

Guaduales was one of the first of these settlements, commonly known as invasions due to their illegal character or the fact that they took place spontaneously on lands privately or publicly owned. Its founders or initial residents were about fifty peasant families from

[18] See, particularly, Juan Ricardo Aparicio, "Intervenciones etnográficas a propósito del sujeto desplazado: estrategias para (des)movilizar una política de la representación", *Revista Colombiana de Antropología*, vol.41 (2005): 135-169.

[19] Lina María Sánchez, *Impacto urbano del desplazamiento forzado en Mocoa-Putumayo. Elementos de diagnóstico y planteamientos para un re-ordenamiento espacial* (Bogotá: CINEP, 2007), 89-90.

different parts of the region, most of whom had met in the course of the bureaucratic pilgrimage through government's offices and humanitarian agencies. The majority of these 'pioneer' settlers had left the place by the time I carried out fieldwork, having moved to other parts of the town and the department or -though these were very rare exceptions- had returned to their lands. However, the few who remained recounted to me the conflictive and difficult beginnings of the settlement.

It all started in October 2000. After weeks of search and deliberation, it was agreed that the best spot was a strip of pasture land along a municipal road going to Guaduales, one of the town's veredas or rural settlements and name by which the future hamlet came to be eventually known. About two kilometres north-east from the town's centre, the place seemed ideal in terms of access and proximity to basic services, government offices and jobs. However, the fact that it was located both on public property (a road) and private lands (a farm), anticipated conflicts with the local authorities. Thus, and notwithstanding their precarious means and resources, action was swift and as planned as circumstances allowed. As the general consensus was that numbers would play an important role in the initial struggles, the decision was made that everyone would squat at once, setting up a "cambuche" or improvised tent on the spot.

People recall the first days of Guaduales as the toughest in the history of the settlement. "Stacked like animals" was an expression I often heard from more than one of the early settlers when describing the overcrowding situation of more than 150 persons, men, women, old, and children, all living under the same roof. A provisional board was created to deal with the most urgent issues such as food provision, cleaning and security, delegating tasks to every member of the settlement, regardless of age or gender. The most important question, however, was the survival of the camp while they reached a formal agreement with the township acknowledging their condition of displacement and hence the legitimate, if not legal, existence of the settlement until a permanent solution was negotiated. This agreement was eventually reached, yet only after fierce confrontations with the local authorities. During the first three weeks, the anti-riot police attempted to evict the place

twice by firing tear gases, to which Guaduales' people responded with machetes, sticks, stones, and any other weapon that came to hand.

The turning point of the struggle came during the third eviction raid, at the end of the first month. Ramiro,[20] a mechanic from Puerto Guzmán (Putumayo) and one of Guaduales' early leaders, proudly related this landmark event in the history of the settlement:

> We knew they were coming on that day. So we sent for the garbage truck saying that there was a huge pile of trash here. And when it came we were waiting with clubs and machetes. We kidnapped the truck and its driver, laid it across the road and put cardboard underneath. I had a small motorbike and we emptied the fuel tank and poured the gasoline over [the cardboard]. And when the police came we told them we would set the truck on fire if they moved a step forward. We put the children in front, then the elderly, then the women, and we stayed at the rear; all with wet wipes and bottles of water to protect us from the tear gases. We stayed there until the Mayor showed up –because he had said before that he didn't want anything to do with us, the displaced- and signed an agreement allowing us to stay there until we were resettled.

If the garbage truck episode represented an important victory for Guaduales' people, it marked just the beginning of a long process that went on much longer than initially expected. Following this event, the next and most urgent step was for those included in the agreement, 56 families that were officially certified as "displaced", to build temporal homes while the township sought funding for a "formal" housing project. They were allowed to build their houses along a thin strip of land on both sides of the road, and plots measuring four metres in front by six metres deep were allocated internally by the board.

At first, houses were to a large extent family versions of the initial cambuche, made of black plastic sheets, cardboard and wooden poles. Yet, as time went by and the promise of new houses remained largely on paper, the settlement gradually began to look less like a camp and more like a neighbourhood of precarious but permanent dwellings. Plastic roofs were gradually replaced by zinc tiles and those who could afford it covered the dirt floors with cement or concrete. Cardboard on the walls gave place to wooden planks, a highly valued good for the displaced, to the point that many people in Guaduales made long journeys back home just to strip them from their abandoned houses or what remained of them.

[20] All the names of Guaduales' interviewees have been changed for pseudonyms.

The attainment of basic services implied long struggles and numerous collective strategies. Since from the point of view of local authorities Guaduales could not be regarded as a formal settlement and it never ceased to be perceived as an invasion, basic infrastructure was never "officially" delivered. Water was obtained from a spring nearby and brought by a hose, and the supply was managed by one of the settlers who charged every household a monthly fee of $2,000 (US$ 1). This situation often gave rise to disputes and quarrels, some families refusing to pay and accusing the "manager" of monopolising and taking advantage of a resource they considered free, while others opted to install their own private hoses.

Electricity constituted another chapter. Initially, it was obtained by gathering and joining several pieces of old wire, making a long cable that was "hung" from an electricity post located at the southern end of the settlement. This strategy, popularly known as "piracy", did not last long due to the overload of users and conflicts with the local power company, causing constant cuts and short circuits. The company, tired of removing the "pirate" cable just to find a new one set up overnight, agreed to provide legal power supply and installed an electricity metre for the whole settlement. Guaduales' people recall that when the first bill arrived, the sum was so large that no one even worried about paying or thinking how it should be shared. Days later, when one of the company's employees came to cut the supply, he found himself on top of an electricity pole surrounded by a crowd of outraged neighbours complaining about the unfair bill and the company's poor service. Eventually, and after being offered a blanket with the implication that he would be obliged to sleep on top of the pole, the hapless technician had no choice but to reconnect the service. The conflict continued until a new agreement was reached with the company, who now installed an independent metre for every four or five houses, making it easier for neighbours to share the costs and control the energy consumption. Though this arrangement did not solve the conflicts and complaints regarding bills and some continued to "pirate" the service, it eventually became the prevailing system in the settlement.

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In April 2010, when I began to visit Guaduales regularly and almost ten years after its birth, the settlement looked like a neighbourhood long since incorporated into the landscape of

Mocoa. A “colectivo” (small bus) ran every half an hour from and to the town centre, where people travel daily for work, shopping and errands. Most young people and adults had jobs in town -women mostly as housemaids and men as construction workers-, while children attended one of the public schools nearby or spent the day in the Bienestar Familiar –the government’s family welfare institution- children’s homes. The place, on the other hand, looked busy all the time. The road not only had a constant traffic of motorbikes and cabs going to the nearby *vereda* but also served as social space and playground for children. Many houses, around 15 out of 70, had “tiendas” or small grocery stores frequented mostly by the same residents as they usually sold “fiado” (on credit) and in smaller quantities than the town’s shops. It was also common to see government and NGO workers around almost daily carrying out all sorts of surveys and campaigns, from vaccination to family planning and birth control.

Guaduales (April 2010)

Guaduales' liveliness, however, should not be interpreted as being indicative of a stable or consolidated neighbourhood and, in many ways, the place continued to exist as the marginal settlement it was in its early days. As previously noted, many of the original dwellers had left, due mainly to the same reasons or problems affecting other displaced settlements: insecure tenure, poor living conditions, lack of or precarious job opportunities, or simply the social stigma of living in an "invasion" neighbourhood.[21] The settlement, however, had not depopulated but actually grown over the years. New residents arrived regularly, usually renting or buying the homes of those who had left or, in some cases, building new shacks in the few available spots that remained. Yet, and for its most part, Guaduales' residents constituted a floating population for whom the place was more a transit location than a permanent home.

Under such conditions, the idea of community seemed difficult to conceive in a place like Guaduales. This had to do not only with the unstable character of the settlement, but also with the fact that most of its residents appeared to have little in common other than the condition of being displaced. Doña María, an Afro-descendant woman displaced from the lower Putumayo and one of the original settlers, summarised well this condition by describing Guaduales' inhabitants as "a mix of everything: indians, blacks, whites, everything"; and yet, at the same time she emphasised how despite class or racial differences and the fleeting character of the settlement, a "sense of community" had developed through time.

During the months that I followed Guaduales' events and everyday conflicts, I corroborated that despite the unstable character of the settlement this sense of community did not only exist but was relatively solid. Furthermore, two related elements distinguished and sustained this sense of community. Firstly, and in contrast to what one might find in a conventional or "formal" neighbourhood, it had been born and persisted in Guaduales not as the result of a long and continuous process of daily coexistence and interaction, but out of necessity. As mentioned above, not only from the perspective of the local authority but

[21] For a detailed socio-economic analysis of the displaced settlements in Mocoa see Sánchez, "*Impacto urbano"*...

to large extent Mocoa's citizens, Guaduales was always seen as an "illegal" and hence undesirable space. For Guaduales' people, this situation meant having to bear not only the burden of stigma, but dealing with the harsh daily realities of informality, the most oppressive and challenging of which constituted the omnipresent threat of eviction. Beyond this threat, vital needs such as water, electricity and other basic services had to be secured, thus demanding collective action and certain minimum level political organisation within the neighbourhood. Community, in other words, was not a matter of choice but of survival.

However, what underpinned the resilience of this community was not so much the challenges it faced daily, as its members *status* of displaced. Being labelled or categorised as displaced persons, inevitably implies belonging to a population subjected to a series of homogenising, often denigrating, discursive and material practices. However, at the same time this same label can also act as a rhetorical and political vehicle through which this condition can be challenged. This was evident in the case of Guaduales, where the condition of displacement not only marginalised but also empowered, most significantly granting *political* legitimacy to certain claims and practices otherwise deemed illegal or unlawful under the town and state laws. Put differently, and going back to Chatterjee's conceptualisation of political societies, the status of displacement became in Guaduales the identity feature that "[gave] *to the empirical form of a population group the moral attributes of a community*".[22] The potential and limits of this transition towards a community, on the other hand, would only be fully exposed in Guaduales' long and conflictive resettlement to be described in the remaining sections of the chapter.

The struggle for resettlement

The community organisation process in Guaduales began with the settlement itself. As mentioned, the original residents set up a provisional board to meet the community's most pressing needs, and above all to face the early eviction threats and handle the negotiations with the township. Although this board continued to exist for some time, it eventually gave place to a formal or "legal" association named ASODESPU (Association of displaced persons

[22] Chatterjee, *The Politics,* 57 (emphasis in original).

of the Putumayo), formally established in 2003 and which survives to the present. This transition was not so much the result of the community's initiative, as of a legal requirement that demands community organisations to have legal personality in order to channel their claims and proposals through state institutions. ASODESPU was initially formed by Guaduales' first 56 settler families, but in the following years it grew significantly as new people moved in and others living in other parts of the town joined. By 2010, the association had about 200 families affiliated and though only a few were active members, it played an important role in dealing with the community's internal affairs as well as making visible its problems with government authorities.

However, ASODESPU's role was not confined to its strictly 'legal' functions or attributes. An equally or even more significant characteristic of it was essentially political. This dimension, otherwise common to the approximate 20 displaced organisations that existed in Mocoa at the time, had to do, at least in part, with the precious value of the vote to both the politician and the displaced. To the former, and particularly those aspiring to local posts such as mayor or councillor, the vote of a displaced community can be decisive, especially considering the relatively small population of a town like Mocoa. As for the latter, the vote is not so much conceived as an expression of political will, as a commodity through which concrete benefits can be obtained for the individual and the community as a whole. Some of those benefits are long term electoral promises recorded in written agreements (e.g. housing projects, delivery of public services or other basic infrastructure), most of which are never or only partially fulfilled. Others are immediate or gathered "in advance" during the electoral campaigns, and range from food baskets and "free services" (e.g. haircuts, medical consultation, legal advice) to free meals and even "cash for votes" on election days.

2011 local election banners. Guaduales (December 2011)

The ability to make the most out of political opportunities both during and after electoral campaigns constitutes one of the essential roles of displaced organisations, one where the political appears as a space where citizenship is not so much exercised as bargained on an almost daily basis. In the particular case of Guaduales, this political dimension is also crucial to understand the different moments and events related to its resettlement process, a story that I gathered in fragments from some of the leaders who played central roles in the different stages of the process. The first of them was Ramiro (mentioned above), whom I first met in one ASODESPU's meetings during 2010 and was known for his confrontational and outspoken character, constantly generating debate and controversy. Ramiro no longer lived in Guaduales, having returned to Puerto Guzmán in 2008, where he ran a small motorcycle repair shop. He was one of the founders of "Familias Unidas de Mocoa", a smaller association organised by families that were initially rejected by ASODESPU, but eventually merged with it. According to him, the first attempt to resettle came from Familias Unidas, which on its own initiative decided to purchase a small plot of land near Guaduales. The land measured two hectares and was bought for $12 million (US$ 6,000), a sum that

was divided among the association's 70 members. The expectations were such that many people from ASODESPU joined for a second phase, and raffles and bazaars were organised to collect money for the future settlement plans. However, and even though the township agreed to fund the project, this initiative was frustrated when they were denied the environmental permit required for construction on the argument that the plot was located in a rural area not zoned for urban development. The disillusioned owners had so far been unable to agree on what to do with the land, and so, lamented Ramiro, "it was left abandoned and criando monte [overgrown]".

The second initiative came from ASODESPU and began during the 2003 local electoral campaign. It originated during a meeting with Elver Cerón, one of the candidates for Mayor, who committed himself to implement a resettlement project in case of being elected. The event took place at a cockfighting ring nearby Guaduales and Ramiro himself drafted a ten-point document in which the candidate promised, amongst other things, to purchase a land plot, obtain funds to develop a housing project, and finance productive projects for the community.

Cerón was elected for the period 2004-2007, according to Ramiro thanks largely to the massive support he got from ASODESPU's members. However, most of his electoral promises included in the agreement never materialised or came too late. A first housing project, named Villa Rosa I and benefiting an initial group of 78 families, was approved in December 2005, at the end of his second year of office. Yet, and even though more than half of the project's total cost was secured through a housing subsidy from the national government, it remained stalled for more than two years. The reason for this long delay was mostly due to the fact that the land where the project was to be developed was not acquired until October 2007, less than three months before Cerón's term came to an end. Finally, during his last month, the Mayor approved a project for a second housing phase, Villa Rosa II, for 61 new families, a move that many in Guaduales regarded as a last minute stratagem to demonstrate the good performance of his administration.

The construction works of Villa Rosa I began in March 2008 with the assistance of the beneficiaries, who as stipulated in the project's general guidelines, were to provide the "unskilled labour" for the building of houses.[23] Ramiro recalled the first months of construction as particularly arduous, starting with the issue that the project's land, a 62 hectares farm located in a peripheral area of Mocoa, did not have any access roads and thus the construction materials had to be brought in on the back of mules or the beneficiaries themselves. To make things even more dramatic, the start of works coincided with the beginning of the rainy season, making the transport of materials and the construction itself a strenuous and sometimes impossible task.

It was in that context that the road entered the picture. During 2008, most of the technical studies related to the Variante San Francisco-Mocoa were completed and Guaduales was identified as one of the project's major concerns.[24] The settlement happened to be located in the future road's right of way and the project's starting point or "kilometre zero". And though all the assessments made clear that resettlement was beyond the project's scope and was a matter for the municipality, this situation gave Guaduales a notoriety it had not enjoyed before. The project's loan terms, for instance, set as the first condition for the initiation of works that the right of way should first be released,[25] hence putting pressure on the township and the Mayor in particular, as well as involving other institutions in the process. One of them was the INVIAS, which had committed to build the access road from the town to the new settlement, thus solving the urgent issue of access.

For Guaduales' residents this new situation was unexpected as they had initially occupied the area before the final layout of the road was decided, but would become a central aspect of their struggle for resettlement. In contrast to most Putumayenses, for whom as previously noted (chapter 5) the future road embodied a long awaited promise of 'progress' and 'development', for Guaduales' people it meant a tangible political asset, rather like the

[23] Banco Agrario de Colombia, "Gerencia de vivienda. Resumen General del Proyecto. Programa retorno o reubicación desplazados. Convocatoria 200508. Radicación 1743054421", n.d.
[24] See INCOPLAN, "Elaboración del Plan Básico", Tomo III. 'Componente de diagnóstico socioeconómico y cultural'", 108; "Plan de manejo ambiental", 16; "Informe de Gestión Ambiental", 195-197.
[25] IADB, "San Francisco-Mocoa alternate road construction"…

vote but perhaps more valuable considering the relevance and magnitude of the project. The question, then, became how to 'capitalise' on this asset given the many conflicts and events that accompanied this new chapter in the history of Guaduales.

A central character to how events would now be determined was Rubén, a displaced person from Curillo (Department of Caquetá) and president of ASODESPU's board between 2007 and 2009. Rubén, more than any other leader I met, emphasised constantly the importance of the displaced leaders' "gestión", a staple and yet complex term within Colombia's political and bureaucratic jargon which could be best translated as the ability to get things done. Rubén himself tirelessly praised his own "gestión" throughout the process, something he credited to his 37 years of experience (he was 59 when I first met him) as community leader and his extensive network of contacts. Thus, he largely attributed to his personal "gestión" during his two years as president and thereafter most of Villa Rosa's progress and relevant events: the agreement signed in June 2008 between ASODESPU and Mario Narváez, the new Mayor, where the latter committed to deliver the houses of Villa Rosa I and II by March 2009; the allotment, by drawing lots, of houses for the beneficiaries; the procurement of food baskets for the those working on the construction; and the obtaining of resources to build a children's home for the new settlement.

Despite Villa Rosa's progress under Rubén's term as president and the growing pressure of the road project to speed up the resettlement process, the new settlement did not move ahead as anticipated. When Narváez's deadline arrived, the houses of Villa Rosa I were half built and the construction of Villa Rosa II had barely started. However, and despite ASODESPU's pressure to mobilise against the Mayor, Rubén refused to support any confrontation outside of institutional channels. This moment came in November 2009, six months after Rubén had finished his term and seven months following the Mayor's promise to finish the project. Eustasio, ASODESPU's new president, narrated the event:

> We were fed up with the negligence of the township. So we decided to carry out a coup so the Mayor would hear us and take us seriously at last. So on the tenth of November around 3 am, we took over the township building. All the community was present. And that day all the authorities showed up: the municipal ombudsman, the public prosecutor, the police, the township officers. And new agreements were signed: the finishing of

> houses, water and electricity services, the construction of streets, etcetera. I mean those agreements were not new but were given a new deadline.

The take-over of the township constituted in many ways a natural and foreseeable response to the municipality's continuous disregard for Guaduales' people's countless claims and petitions regarding Villa Rosa. However, this event also reflected a change of strategy on the part of the displaced, a shift explained at least in part to the new president. Eustasio was an ex-military –he had served as professional soldier in a counter-guerrilla battalion for 12 years- and coffee farmer from Acevedo (Department of Huila) who arrived in Guaduales during 2006. Ever since then, he had been actively involved with ASODESPU, and during Rubén's term he had been in charge of the association's committee of works. However, and differently to Rubén, Eustasio's notion of "gestión" was grounded not so much on political negotiation and networking but public confrontation. Thus, it was a salient feature of his speech to stress that the community should "take matters on their own hands" or "take action" if their demands were not met through the regular channels, or politicians failed to comply with their promises.

Beneficiaries fencing plot. Villa Rosa (November 2010)

If the township "coup" reflected ASODESPU's new politics under Eustasio, the significance of this event can hardly be reduced to a change or transition on the organisation's

leadership. Rather, I think, this significance has to be located in the longer history of Guaduales, and especially what it revealed of both the changes and continuities in the community's struggle. It represented a substantial change, for this event would have been unthinkable in the early days of the settlement, where the displaced demands were met with tear gas and clubs. And while this change was undoubtedly related with how the phenomena of internal displacement had during the past years gained relevance with the government's agenda, the event also revealed an organised community capable of mobilising in order to make its voice heard. Yet, the fact that in order to be heard and "taken seriously" such an extreme and desperate measure had to be taken, also showed how little the *nature* of the relation between the displaced and the state had evolved over time. In this sense, the township event did not represent a step forward in Guaduales' struggle for basic rights so much as it suggested the attainment of such rights continued to be mediated primarily by the conflictive and unstable terrain of political confrontation and compromise.

This oscillation between change and progression on the one hand and continuity or persistence on the other, constitutes a central aspect to understand Guaduales' resettlement history. This aspect, moreover, could be captured not only through the leaders' memories of landmark events, but from Guaduales' peoples' everyday accounts and anecdotes about the settlement, all of which told the same tale: moments of advancement followed by stagnation and setback, small victories and breakdowns, people coming and leaving, fits and starts, times of expectation and dismay. Villa Rosa, in this sense, did not constitute a break but a continuation of this fluctuating movement, with the difference that the drama was now transposed to a new setting. However, as I shall describe next, the intensity of events and conflicts that accompanied the beginnings of the new settlement, made it possible to observe those changes and continuities in a compressed time frame.

Villa Rosa

The most telling fact about Villa Rosa is perhaps that it was never officially inaugurated: no cutting of tape ceremony, no speeches, no press release. Guaduales' people do not even recall a specific date. According to Doña María, in early March 2010 the presidents of the association boards (ASODESPU was now internally divided into Villa Rosa I and II) handed over the house keys to the beneficiaries. "Rumours were that we should move in at once or otherwise the houses would be re-allotted to other people" she said, while noting that the event coincided with an announcement from the township notifying them that Guaduales should be emptied straightaway. However, only a very few complied with the order. Most put in some stuff or began to visit the place regularly to "mark territory" but refused to move, for the place, they said, was "unliveable", a word that accurately captured the precarious conditions of the new settlement.

To begin with, even by the standards of social housing projects, the house size was extremely small (27 square metres in Villa Rosa I and 37 in Villa Rosa II), especially considering that they were conceived as homes for families averaging five members. Certainly, if regarded in terms of their "features" –two-room rectangular structures of bare cement brick and dirt floors- they could be better described as brick shelters rather than actual houses. They had no bathroom or kitchen, no electricity, and no water supply. They came with septic tanks but most of them were useless as they had been dug on clay soils with low absorption capacity or, even worse, were positioned above the house level, a situation which some beneficiaries sarcastically remarked implied that "the constructors probably wanted us to shit uphill". In addition, some of the houses were built on unstable ground, so they already had cracks and fissures on the walls. On top of all this and to complete the new settlement's grim diagnosis, no internal street network was built, so most of the houses had to be accessed or were connected by muddy pathways.

Section of Villa Rosa (May 2010)

In early April 2010, when I started fieldwork, Villa Rosa's situation had improved little, and the conflict between the township, the Guaduales community and the road project was at boiling point. The Mayor's time limit –the one agreed upon during the township take-over on November 2009- to deliver the project in full was a few weeks ahead, but at this point it was clear that this deadline, like the previous ones, would not be met on time or even in the near term. INVIAS, meanwhile, urged to release the right of way to allow the start of the road works in the Mocoa section, pressed the township to carry out the resettlement without further delay. The Mayor, for his part, kept sending eviction notices to Guaduales whilst at the same time assuring ASODESPU's leaders that he was making the respective "gestión" to solve Villa Rosa's many problems. Yet Guaduales' people refused to leave, and responded to the threats by showing up at the INVIAS offices and other local authorities with the several unfulfilled agreements from the actual and previous Mayor. Eustasio even

spoke with some regularity on local radio to counter the public perception, fuelled by the Mayor himself he thought, that the Guaduales community was unwilling to resettle despite the housing "solution" they had been provided with.

In this vicious circle of mutual accusations and claims, the most obvious truth of Villa Rosa was exposed –that the houses' precariousness and unfinished state was nothing but a reflection of the uncertain political arrangements and promises in which they were grounded. The first and most critical issue was that Villa Rosa never had a housing design plan per se. According to the township secretary of projects under Elver Cerón, the Mayor "showed up one day with a list of IDs to be presented as beneficiaries for housing subsidies in the Banco Agrario"[26]. Cerón, he added, actually requested a design of the housing plan, but at the end it was never carried out since the construction of houses was contracted several months prior to the acquisition of the land.[27] As consequence of this incongruity, the actual "housing plan" ended up being basically a random division of the land into individual plots measuring an average 20x30 metres (600 square metres). Another, equally striking fact, related to the houses themselves. In Villa Rosa I, the most controversial case, the houses' plan showed structures of 35 square metres and included one bathroom and a small exterior kitchen. Nevertheless, the project's guidelines approved by the Banco Agrario stated that the subsidy was for "housing improvement" instead of construction.[28] Although this detail was never clarified and ended up adding to Villa Rosa's list of "unresolved" questions, the general consensus –including that of the current Mayor- was that the small amount of the subsidy was the reason why the bathroom and kitchen were never built.

[26] Banco Agrario is the public institution through which the government house subsidies for Villa Rosa were channelled.
[27] Personal interview, May 12th, 2010.
[28] Banco Agrario de Colombia, "Gerencia de vivienda"...

Villa Rosa I house (July 2010)

While the current Mayor publicly blamed Villa Rosa's many flaws on the previous administration, Elver Cerón, the political architect of the project, obstinately defended his involvement in the matter. When I interviewed him to talk about his role in Villa Rosa, his answers were for the most part an exaltation of his own "gestión".[29] So, when I brought up the housing subsidy issue he avoided the question by stressing that at the time the available subsidies were "too small" so he had to "echar mano de lo que había" (get a hold of what they had). On the contrary, he emphasised the hardships he faced to find a piece of land that suited the "dream" of a "rural style" urbanisation. This dream, he added, was shared with the Guaduales community, and one of the points agreed upon was that the settlement would not have streets; thus, and leaving no room for argument, he firmly stated: "They were warned: this is a farm. And it will be provided with paths. But it will have no streets". But the main problem of Villa Rosa according to the ex-Mayor lay not in its construction or design defects but the "lack of strong hand" throughout the process: lack of strong hand on the part of the Mayor that allowed Guaduales' people to settle there at first; and lack of strong hand on the part of the current one, afraid of "taking hands in the matter". He claimed that those currently refusing to resettle were not "real displaced" –for according to

[29] Personal interview, November 13th, 2010.

him these “thanked god for having at least a house”- but opportunists looking to take advantage of the situation. Thus, and faithful to his strong fist approach, he stated his solution to the problem: “That could put an end to it. It’s a shame it is not in my hands. Then it would be like this: ‘take your new home, give me yours’, then you have the old house demolished and no one will be there again”.

Cerón’s views on the Guaduales displaced people are worth reproducing here not for the political rhetoric in which they are framed, but the underlying perceptions in which the rhetoric is rooted. The displaced individual appears inexorably linked to a series of immutable realities he cannot escape and on which his *assimilation* to the spatial and social order of the city depends: he is “rural”, as opposed to “urban”, and as such he must be resettled in a “rural style”, a style which in the ex-Mayor’s vision means a clearly segregated space from the town, and whose main landmark is the absence of streets. On the other hand, the displaced are implicitly assumed here as “rightless” subjects not on account of their *legal* status but their *natural* endowments. This is plainly evident in the emphasis on Guaduales’ “real”, as opposed to “false”, displaced population: the former –peasant, poor, dispossessed, homeless- are infallibly recognised by the fact that they are grateful and willing to move to their new homes, regardless of their uninhabitable condition; on the contrary, those conditioning their resettlement to the fulfilment of certain basic rights are by definition “opportunists”, a list in which the ex-Mayor included money lenders, traders and even “well-off people” from town.

Perceptions of this sort were by no means confined to the politicians’ rhetoric and during my time in the Putumayo I saw how they were reproduced in many other contexts. For instance, Doña María indignantly recalled once how a group of social workers and physiologists had come to Guaduales to teach the women how to “inhabit” the new houses, and suggested that the “space issue” was related to the displaced people’s lack of family planning rather than flaws in the construction and design. Another example that had become a regular joke among Villa Rosa’s beneficiaries was the explanation, brought up by the constructor, that the houses’ unfinished state had to do with the fact that they had been

originally conceived as "self-construction" homes or a base from which inhabitants could make sequential improvements.

Together, these perceptions could be seen as a "language of stateness"[30] or governance through which the inclusive exclusive relation between the displaced and the state was daily enacted. However, it was also through this same language, through its systematic appropriation and subversion, that this relation was constantly defied and challenged. Nowhere was this more evident than in the different "encounters" between the community and the local authorities. These encounters were largely performing acts where some of the conflicts which surrounded the resettlement process were dramatically staged, while others deliberately silenced or ignored. Furthermore, as performing acts, they confronted roles rather than individuals: the township officers as "the authority", the Guaduales' residents as "the community" or "the displaced", and so on.

An encounter of this kind took place in June 2010. At this stage, most of Villa Rosa's issues remained unsolved and the tensions between the community, the township and the other institutions involved in the project continued to rise. Conflicts regarding the new settlement were also affecting the Guaduales community from within. A few days earlier, at an ASODESPU's assembly, Rubén had quit the board amid a heated discussion in which he was accused of charging a fee to allot new plots in Villa Rosa. In addition, some families had recently moved to Villa Rosa and rented or even sold their old homes, breaking both the commitment with the township of dismantling the houses upon leaving, and the internal arrangement of remaining in Guaduales until the agreements with the township were fulfilled. It was in this troubled environment that the township and the INVIAS convened a meeting at Guaduales to address the different problems related to the resettlement process.

The event was scheduled for the 17th at 2 PM, and despite the time most of Guaduales's residents were present. The setting, arranged by the residents themselves in one the few houses with a cement patio, consisted of a dining table covered with a white tablecloth and

[30] Hansen and Stepputat, *States of imagination,* 5-10.

a few plastic chairs. These were reserved for the "authorities", namely the Mayor, the local Director of INVIAS, and the township Secretary of Planning, while the "community" was to remain standing. At 2 PM the residents slowly began to gather at the spot, some bringing chairs and umbrellas to shelter from the sun. The first authority to arrive, around 2:15, was the Secretary of Planning, a young woman who rode a motorbike while carrying a thick folder and a USB memory stick hanging from her neck. The Director of INVIAS, easily recognisable by the institution's official 4x4 white Toyota, appeared at half past two. At this point the place was quite crowded and the air was getting a bit tense, people starting to hear and spread a rumour, seemingly supported by the Secretary looking anxious and stuck on her phone, about the whereabouts of this Mayor. He finally showed up at 2:45 offering no excuses for his lateness and took the central chair, leaving the director of INVIAS on his right and the Secretary on the left. The latter, visibly relieved, quickly proceeded to read the agenda, a four point document rigorously following the official protocol and consisting of interventions by the Mayor, the Director of INVIAS and the community –in that order- and, finally, the reading and signing of the meeting minutes.

Leaving aside the loaded visual language of this ritual –the gestures, the setting, the tacit hierarchies, the observed protocols- and if one had to summarise the event in one word, that word would be "will". The term was so overwhelmingly present throughout the meeting, that at some point it seemed as if it had become another actor on the stage with agency of its own. It was first invoked by the Mayor, who devoted most of his speech to exonerate his administration of any blame regarding Villa Rosa. The main problem behind the delays and the current state of the settlement, he began arguing, was the rush and improvisation on the part of the previous administration to get the housing project approved, and the lack of resources of his to get it finished. Yet, he added how despite this obstacle he had always demonstrated *the will* to help the community (here he addressed the INVIAS officer as well), and by way of evidence he proceeded -with assistance of the Secretary- to enumerate the progress achieved lately: resources had been secured for the extension of houses in Villa Rosa I, the water supply network was under construction and he estimated it would be ready "in a month or so", and the township council had recently

allocated a budget to build the street network. Then, and to provide further proof of his *will*, he recalled how in last December the township had sent some "little Christmas presents", sweaters and flip flops, to Guaduales. Therefore, and as a way of retribution, he concluded, the township expected "the community" to have patience and, above all, *the will* to resettle in a "timely and orderly fashion".

Upon this last remark expressions of indignation were heard among the crowd, but the Secretary called for "order and respect for the agenda", and proceeded to give the floor to the Director of INVIAS. He began by highlighting the magnitude and significance of the road project, in his words "aimed at replacing one of the most dangerous roads in the country and the world", and how there were "growing concerns in the Bank" (the IADB, the project lender) and the INVIAS headquarters in Bogotá about the current situation in Guaduales. He then stressed that they were conscious of their "difficult situation" and had tried to understand it, "though", he added, "you who live it know better", and thus they had sent sociologists and social workers at different occasions to ask them how they were living and how the situation in Guaduales was. In doing so, he continued, they had also "demonstrated *the will* to help", even though, he hastened to add, the INVIAS and the Bank were not responsible for the resettlement process. This *will* he further illustrated by mentioning the different occasions in which INVIAS had allocated resources for the construction of access ways and bridges, and following this he declared that: "we keep *the will* to continue supporting you, but we need to get something in exchange, which is, in a very near future, to have the way released". And thereupon he added –saying he was "going to be clear"- that they needed to know if this *will* did or did not exist and, in such case, they would have to look for a "different alternative", most likely a different route bypassing Guaduales. This, he concluded, was the "message and the question" he brought from Bogotá, where "they", he again stressed, "were very concerned about the situation of Guaduales".

It was now 3:30 and the turn for the "community" to speak. Eustasio took the floor, and following the protocol greetings, began by stating that –he addressed the Director of INVIAS here- they had never said they did not want to resettle since they were the most affected by staying put; but "they", he went on, now addressing the Mayor, "had some agreements

that had been signed at some meetings". And then, addressing both the community and the authorities, he declared: "We have *the will*, I know the community have *the will*. What we are asking from the township is the delivery of basic services: as displaced, as any human beings, we need those services". Eustasio's claims were then repeated by some of the beneficiaries present, and each intervention was followed by applause from the "community". A man in the front row eagerly protested that the problem was not *the will* but the endless delay in the delivery of services, and added that it was no one's secret that those already living there were forced to "pirate" the electricity. A woman towards the back angrily asked if the water supply works the Mayor referred to were "some chunks of pipe" that have been laying uninstalled in Villa Rosa for months and said they were currently "collecting water from a ditch". The Mayor replied that it was true there was no water but "the solution" was already there and asked for patience while reassuring that the township had "all *the will* to help".

Arguments of this kind continued for another ten minutes until, at around 4 PM, the director of INVIAS asked for the floor again and, assuming a conciliatory tone, declared that the important thing was that all the parts had demonstrated *will*. He said he would take this "message" back to Bogotá, and suggested scheduling another meeting within a maximum period of 20 days "to make commitments and define timeframes". Even though faces of skepticism and resignation were everywhere to be seen among the crowd, the motion was unanimously approved and the Secretary hastily proceeded to read the minutes and have them signed by those in attendance. Upon finishing this the INVIAS' director and the Mayor, the first ones to sign, walked back to their respective vehicles and left, the residents slowly dispersed towards their homes, while Eustasio made arrangements with the Secretary to get a copy of the document. At 4:30 the setting was totally cleared and the place empty.

Despite such profuse demonstrations of will displayed throughout the two and half hours that the encounter lasted, no meeting took place within the agreed timeframe –the next meeting took place in October, this time convened by Guaduales' surrounding neighbourhoods-, and the conditions of the resettlement remained largely unaltered. Yet this encounter, as well as previous and future ones, was of crucial significance if considered

not only in terms of the explicit commitments recorded, but of the implicit or tacit agreements reached. The recurrent invocation of *will*, in this sense, acted not so much as a gesture void of meaning, but as a mutual rhetorical maneuver aimed at guaranteeing an equilibrium or *status quo* that at this stage benefited the "authorities" and "community" alike. For the township, and particularly the Mayor, this *status quo* meant another deferral to the commitments regarding Villa Rosa, most likely with the expectation that the "problem" would be inherited –as ended up being the case– by the next politician in office. For INVIAS, responsible for overseeing that the resettlement was carried out according to the Bank's resettlement policies –as was never the case-,[31] it meant keeping its role as a mediator or neutral actor while the process ran its slow course. And for the Guaduales' displaced persons, highly conscious that the road was their most valuable asset in the conflict with the township, it meant a new time extension of their stay in the old settlement while their demands concerning the new one were gradually addressed. These would eventually be met, and yet only through the same sort of conflicts, crises and struggles so distinctive of *political society.*

On continuity and change

Amid the unstable *status quo* of sporadic political arrangements, renewed promises and endless daily conflicts, Villa Rosa progressed slowly. Part of this progress derived from the piecemeal interventions and projects of the various institutions and agencies directly or indirectly involved with the displaced population. Thus, the water supply problem was provisionally solved by a long hose donated by the ACNUR, funding for the kitchens and other house improvements was obtained through the IOM, and the completion of the settlement's street network was funded with additional resources from the INVIAS. The other part came from the beneficiaries themselves, both through individual improvements to their homes and "mingas" (collective work sessions) during weekends and holidays.

[31] See: IADB "Involuntary resettlement. Operational policy and background paper (OP-710)", Washington, D.C. 1998, accessed September 15, 2010, http://www.iadb.org/intal/intalcdi/PE/2010/07171.pdf

Minga for construction of path. Villa Rosa (November 2010)

Villa Rosa I house improved by beneficiary (November 2010)

Despite such improvements, by the time I concluded fieldwork, in December 2010, only relatively few families (around 30 out of the original 139) were living in Villa Rosa, and seen from a day to day perspective the evolution of the new settlement seemed stalled. During the next two years, however, I returned for short visits that allowed me to follow up Villa Rosa's progress on a longer-term basis. In November 2011, the first impression upon arriving to the place was of an uneven construction landscape of many shapes and tones: some houses were radically transformed, the grey cement facades painted with bright colours or adorned with potted plants, the original areas expanded by the building of additional rooms, and the plots filled with grown crops and chicken coops; others showed ongoing construction work, with piles of sand, gravel, cement and other materials stacked in front of them; while others were left unfinished and seemed abandoned or never occupied, with weeds growing on the walls and on top of the roofs.

The settlement exhibited some progress as well. Although the electricity supply had not yet been provided, the installation of the network in Villa Rosa I was almost completed (Villa Rosa II would take another year) and the township had promised to connect the service by Christmas. The water had finally been delivered and consisted of an external water tap for each house (for they had no plumbing installed), but people complained that it did not reach all the houses or the pressure was too low. The streets had also been completed, although they were more a series of bulldozed (graded) paths than a proper street network, and some remained impassable during the rainy months.

Villa Rosa (November 2011)

Electoral banners displayed on the houses' walls and public spaces could tell that 2011 had been an intense political year. Municipal elections had taken place last October, and Elver Cerón had been elected as Mayor of Mocoa for the second time. According to Doña María, despite the distrust towards the politician in question due to the promises left unfulfilled during his first term, many in Villa Rosa and Guaduales had again voted for him, in the hope that "he would come back and finish the job he had begun". Yet, in contrast to 2003, no specific electoral agreements had been made with him or any other candidate, a situation partly reflecting the current weak state of Villa Rosa's associations. Months before, Eustasio had disappeared suddenly with no apparent reason and there was no trace of him, but the rumours were that before leaving he had been selling plots to non-displaced persons from Mocoa. Villa Rosa I had appointed a new president, but the association was now partly divided between those who were already living there and those who still refused to leave Guaduales (about half of the original beneficiaries), and the board complained of the low

attendance at the meetings and mingas. Rubén, for his part, had been working since his withdrawal from Villa Rosa I's board on the development of a third urbanisation phase –called Villa Rosa III-, a project for those residents from Guaduales excluded from the two initial projects. Most of these were officially classified as "vulnerable population" or "structural poor" rather than displaced people, and were commonly described by the latter as "displaced by poverty". Villa Rosa III had its own board and although Rubén was not officially part of it he was usually the one who allocated the plots and made the required "gestión" for the procurement of housing subsidies and other supports.

El Paraíso (November 2011)

In addition to the three "legal" housing projects, a new settlement known as "El Paraíso" (Paradise) had appeared on the mountain located on the north side of the Villa Rosa (see picture above). Villa Rosa's residents considered this land part of their settlement, and said they had been told by the township that it was part of a forest reserve area where no constructions were allowed. No one in Villa Rosa seemed to know or relate to the new

neighbours during the time I was present, and even though the area had been internally allocated in the form of farming plots as a sort of contingency measure to demonstrate possession over the land, the new neighbourhood was growing rapidly.

In December 2012, my last trip to the Putumayo, Guaduales was gone. The last families' decision to leave had not been motivated by the continual eviction threats, nor the delivery of the township commitments regarding Villa Rosa, which were never completely fulfilled. Rather, the decision had been made after the road project and concretely INVIAS, in order to clear the project's right of way, had offered the remaining residents a cash incentive – purportedly for them to finish their houses- on the condition that they dismantled their current homes and cleared off from the intended route of the road. The last family had left the old settlement two months before and the few remaining vestiges of Guaduales were being rapidly covered by brush (picture below), to the point that it was difficult to imagine that a hamlet had ever existed there.

Guaduales (December 2012)

The new settlement, in contrast, looked fully inhabited and alive. Apart from the 139 houses of Villa Rosa I and II –now almost totally occupied-, Villa Rosa III had 15 houses in different stages of construction. The children's home had been finally completed and was also being used as a community meeting place, and there were plans to build a small chapel with the support of Mocoa's parish. Another significant improvement achieved that year had been the establishment of a bus route to town, making the former 45-minute walk to the centre or the costly taxi service avoidable. Despite these developments, it was difficult to describe Villa Rosa as a stable neighbourhood and the general sensation, as previously with Guaduales, was of a place with people coming and leaving regularly. For instance, even though the original agreement with the township was that the beneficiaries should occupy the homes for an uninterrupted period of five years to be granted ownership, this regulation was rarely followed, and in practice it was common for families to leave temporarily or permanently and rent or even sell their houses to newcomers.

El Paraíso too had expanded quickly and around 60 houses (compared to 20 from a year before) could be counted, the majority of which were cambuches or shacks similar to the ones found previously in Guaduales. Yet, and somewhat paradoxically, Villa Rosa's residents showed certain aversion towards the new settlement, and remarked with scorn that "the place is called The Paradise but looks like hell". In the last year there had been some approaches, but the relationship between the two neighbourhoods remained mostly of mutual indifference, apart from a recent friction around the fact that El Paraíso was "pirating" the water and energy from Villa Rosa. However, El Paraíso's main conflict was with the township, which insisted on the illegal character of the settlement, while its residents claimed their status of displaced persons and thus demanded a formal housing scheme.

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I did not carry out fieldwork in El Paraíso, but listening to what people from Villa Rosa and outside (township officers and NGO's workers) commented about the sort of claims, conflicts and dynamics present in the incipient settlement, it was impossible not to think of

Guaduales a decade earlier. Both settlements seemed part of a same history, shaped not by a linear or diachronic pattern of events but rather a constant oscillation between change and continuity, a never-ending cycle where a frontier space gradually closed while other emerged.

There are many different ways to think of or account for both these two dimensions, some of which I have attempted to capture in describing some of the conflicts, events and characters comprising the long and tortuous transition from Guaduales to Villa Rosa. For instance, we could portray change by pointing at the most visible or tangible differences distinguishing the old and new settlements: the improvement of the houses' structures from cardboard, wood and plastic to concrete and cement, the transition from living under constant eviction threats to a situation of relatively secure tenure, the delivery of "legal" basic public services, or simply the reduction of stigma stemming from inhabiting a place called "urbanisation" –no matter its precarious character- instead of "invasion". We could also think of change by considering other relevant and yet not so palpable developments and dynamics, without which the former, more visible, changes would hardly be conceivable. Most significant, perhaps, is the process through which an uprooted and alien population group gradually acquired a "sense of community" vital in their struggle for rights and recognition. The wide array of tactics, strategies, and manoeuvres encompassing and sustaining this struggle would, as I have tried to illustrate, be unthinkable without the persistence of this "sense of community" despite the many obstacles, conflicts and contradictions to which it is continuously subjected.

I have approached and addressed the struggles of the displaced drawing on Chatterjee's notion of "political society", a concept which, as noted, aims to shed light on the lives of those whose relationship with the state is not mediated by the formal rules of democracy but the deeply unstable and uncertain realm of politics. This distinction is, as Chatterjee stresses, critical to understand not only the potential and possibilities of such struggles but their own limits. I have tried to draw attention on these limits by emphasising the sort of continuities or permanencies underlying Guaduales' resettlement process and, specially, the ways in which they stem from or reflect the fragile and messy political ground in which

this process was rooted and sustained. This political ground, on the other hand, was not just confined to the ceaseless disputes and clashes between community and authorities, but the different conflicts intrinsic to both, for instance the political disputes between the township and the road project or the conflicting visions on the principle of "gestión" among Guaduales' leaders.

In addressing continuity, similarly to issue of change, we have to account not just for the visible or manifest. In particular, I have suggested how underneath the different policies and actions towards the displaced we find a series of deeply-rooted perceptions, which together strongly mirror the relation of *inclusive exclusion* to which the rightless –if not stateless- peoples are daily subjected. In doing so, I have argued that the displaced personifies in many ways the condition of the frontier: perpetually associated with a state of violence -even though it might be recognised as an *effect* of this same violence- and, as such, relegated to exist in social and spatial margins; in other words, included or assimilated into the order of the state through a series of exclusionary political, economic, and social practices.

Nowhere in Guaduales' resettlement history was this relation so clearly exposed as in Villa Rosa: from the settlement's peripheral location to the houses' tiny size and "structural" design flaws, to the unfinished and precarious state in which the project was delivered, and to the ex-Mayor's statement that the "real" displaced were those grateful to god for the housing solution they had been offered. Yet the crucial aspect of this relationship lies not only in its pervasive effects or manifestations but, as it has been argued in this chapter and the preceding ones, in that it forces us to think of social and spatial constructs (state, frontier, community, and so forth) not as dichotomous realms but parts of a same dialectical ensemble. In the particular case of Guaduales, I described how the sense of community was inexorably tied to the perceptions and forms of exclusion to which its inhabitants were daily subjected. These perceptions and exclusions, in other words, speak not only of how the displaced have been produced as a governance category and in this way assimilated (spatially, politically, and socially) to the order of the state, but how the displaced peoples make sense of and contest this order.

Special emphasis was laid on the languages and rituals through which this relationship was enacted, defied or negotiated. The expression "will", for instance, represents a powerful example of an abstract yet effective discursive tactic used both by state authorities and displaced community to negotiate the terms of Guaduales' resettlement. The most telling expression of this relationship, however, was embodied in the condition of displacement itself, a condition which not only stigmatised but in certain ways empowered, most evidently granting legitimacy to an array of practices deemed unlawful, from the occupation of public or private lands to the "pirating" of public services. The "success" of these practices and in general the displaced claims to rights, on the other hand, largely depended on the capacity of people to act collectively as a community.

An important question which arises here is how can we locate these practices and claims beyond the unstable terrain of everyday dispute and conflict so distinctive of political society. Chatterjee has argued that despite the risks and limitations involved in political societies (e.g. gender inequality, intra-community violence), they can lead to the expansion of democratic participation or even redefine the ways in which the very idea of democracy has been traditionally conceived. Although I find it difficult to conceive Guaduales' resettlement process as an example of democratic consolidation, I see this notion of political society as useful to grasp the sort dynamics shaping this process and, more broadly, the relations and imbrications between state and displaced peoples.

Forced displacement, rather, constitutes a phenomenon that has to be understood in the larger context of Colombia's long history of violence, whose analysis is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In conceiving this phenomenon and in particular Guaduales' resettlement process in terms of the relation of *inclusive exclusion* between frontier and state, I have attempted to expose and question some of the discursive and material practices through which this violence is sustained, reproduced, and contested. This is precisely why I think the contrasting image of Villa Rosa and El Paraíso is so revealing of this relationship –because it speaks of both the persistence and pervasiveness of this relationship and how people struggle with it in everyday life. This continual oscillation between change and continuity is also, I believe, one of the most distinctive aspects of the historical geography of frontier and state I have sought to explore in this thesis.

Conclusion
The condition of frontier

There are two particularly pervasive images of Colombia. The first one inexorably evokes abundance, as symbolised in the country's coat of arms, which displays cornucopias overflowing with gold coins and tropical fruits, a golden pomegranate, and the Panama Isthmus with its two adjacent seas alluding to Colombia being the only South American country with coastlines in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. This image is also summed up in the large posters adorning the walls of Bogotá's "El Dorado" airport corridors, advertising some of the country's exuberant landscapes and landmarks: the imposing cordilleras, fertile valleys and coffee fields of the Andean region, the vast savannahs of the *Llanos*, the pristine forests of the Amazon and Pacific region, unspoiled Caribbean beaches, and pre-Columbian relics from the Gold Museum, among others. The second one, no less ubiquitous, evokes conflict and is almost unvaryingly portrayed in terms of causes (rampant poverty and inequality, endemic corruption, land concentration, narcotraffic, social injustice) and effects (rural areas devastated by decades of war between government, guerrilla and paramilitary forces; massive forced displacement, daily scenes of bloodshed, thousands of hectares of forests cleared to plant coca).

In trying to reconcile these antagonistic images, we sometimes hear that abundance is a curse, an axiom that can be traced back to eighteenth century theories on the relationship between climate and type of government (where excessive fertility of the soil tended to be associated with despotic regimes),[32] but can also be found nowadays in elaborate models

[32] See, for instance, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract,* 91-98; Montesquieu, "The Spirit of the Laws", 194-200.

showing strong associations between resources and rent seeking, internal conflict and political instability (or the so-called "resource curse").[33] More often, however, we are told that the country's long conflict is a consequence of "structural" exclusion on its manifold manifestations: political, social, economic, class, racial, gender, geographical. Moreover, these forms of exclusion are regularly believed to emanate from a common and generic source, the State (capitalised).

This dichotomous set of images is best synthesised by the single image of the frontier. This image was constructed and has always been governed by two dominant tropes. The first speaks of a "land of opportunity" and is generally expressed in terms of vastness and richness: abundant empty or vacant lands, inexhaustible and unexploited resources, and so forth. This trope is as strong in Codazzi's mid-nineteenth century promising depictions of the *Territorio del Caquetá*, as in present-day allusions to this same territory as "the last frontier", used both in reference to its untapped resources (biodiversity, oil, mining, tourism) and the dangers (environmental, social, ethnic) involved in present and future plans to exploit them. The other trope, equally enduring, imagines the frontier as a "marginal territory" and is conveyed through its various associated meanings: backwardness, illegality, peripherality, isolation, barbarism, savagery. This image of the frontier as a marginal territory, furthermore, is habitually expressed in terms of exclusion from the state, or the idea of the frontier as those territories where the state has not arrived or is yet to arrive because it has historically been too weak or unwilling to do so. And the main effect of this state "absence" is that the association of the frontier with lawlessness and barbarity is reinforced or rendered natural. The frontier, then, appears as a "natural" theatre of war where the "vacuum" of the state is filled with and disputed between guerrillas, drug dealers, and all sorts of outlaw characters.

These two tropes of wealth and marginality not only lie at the core of the narratives through which the image of frontier was crafted but coexist in the everyday life of the frontier territories. They are manifested in the many schemes and projects, real and utopian, aimed

[33] Ian Bannon and Paul Collier, eds., *Natural Resources and Violent Conflict: Options and Actions* (Washington: The World Bank, 2003).

at “developing” the frontier, as well as in the quotidian images of a development that appears elusive, the same images through which frontier peoples condemn the absence of the state or express their feelings of marginality or exclusion from it: lack of roads, schools, hospitals, governmental support, and so on. These are long-standing claims that emerge again and again in strikes, petitions to politicians and complaints to the central government. These are real claims that mirror real forms of exclusion. Yet, if we situate these forms of exclusion in the long-duration or think of them in terms of their permanence in time and embeddedness in space, they reappear in a different guise; that is, not as manifestations of exclusion *from* but as expressions of inclusion *in* the state. This distinction, subtle as it might seem, is of paramount importance to understand what I have tentatively described as the historical geography of state and frontier.

In order to better comprehend this distinction, let us go back to the amputated map of Colombia displayed in the introduction to this thesis. In this map, the Amazon -including the Putumayo- and *Llanos* or Orinoquia regions (comprising roughly two thirds of the country’s total area) appear partially removed and partially shown in blank and filled with the map conventions. This type of map is so commonly reproduced in history textbooks that it comes to seem as natural as the other, complete map of Colombia. The answer to the question of why this section of the map is cut-off, moreover, is generally found in the marginal role the territory it encompasses is assigned in the narrative. The question, in this way, becomes tautological and is reversed to why such territory (most of which corresponds to the so-called internal frontiers) should appear in the map if it lacks of any historical relevance or significance. What we tend to forget, however, is that the map is not a cartographical representation of history but of a dominant narrative of history and of the way in which the frontier has been incorporated in such narrative. In other words, for the frontier to be excluded from the map or shown blank on it, it had first to be imagined and included into the narrative as a “marginal”, “empty” or “backward” space. Again, these are not “natural” features but discursively constructed ones. The point is that through the process of reproduction (of the narrative) and replication (of the map) these features are normalised and come to appear natural.

This narrative is related and in some way reinforces the hegemonic narrative of the state. Within this other narrative, which lies at the core of the *creole* (postcolonial) project of nation state, state-formation is conceived as a teleological process through which a political centre gradually expands over and assimilates peripheral stateless territories and populations. At the same time, however, this project was rooted and depended on the existence of a series binary oppositions –"civilisation" vs. "savagery" or "barbarism", "progress" vs. "backwardness", "culture" vs. "nature"-, the same oppositions through which the very notions of the state -its foundational myth- and the frontier were constructed. And it is here where the central paradox of the state project is exposed. For if, on the one hand this project is predicated on the geographical, spatial and social integration of the country, on the other its legitimacy depends on the production and preservation of such dichotomous oppositions –that is, on the existence of the frontier and its *image* of exteriority to (and antithesis of) the state. Yet, as it was argued, this image does not mean that the frontier is excluded from or lies outside the state. What it means is that its assimilation to the state, its incorporation within its political and spatial order, has historically depended on the perpetuation of its *status* of frontier, regardless of the ways in which this status is expressed.

This simultaneous condition of inclusion and exclusion that we find exhibited in both the *creole* nation-state project and Colombia's cut-off map, is what defines the relationship of *inclusive exclusion* shaping the historical geography of state and frontier. There are two main dimensions of this relationship, which I sought to explore historically and ethnographically through the discourses and practices related to the road. The first has to do with the way in which this relationship was assembled and became hegemonic, and the role played by the road in this process. The primary aim here was to describe how the frontier and the state were imagined or discursively constructed as two opposed yet mutually dependent orders, the former's aura of supremacy and legitimacy built upon the latter's image of savagery. This process was captured by the road in two related ways. First, in how it came to embody the "civilising" character of the state, especially though its powerful image of a redemptive infrastructure aimed at breaking the mountainous barrier

separating the Andean highlands and the Putumayo lowlands. Second, in the way in which it was conceived and built totally depended on the persistence of the frontier's "savage" character.

The discursive violence implied in the confrontation between civilisation and savagery embodied by the road is vital to understand the physical violence involved in its construction and in the broader dynamics it has assisted and supported. This violence was manifest most visibly in the dispossession of indigenous lands and labour, but also revealed in the persistent expressions of confinement, abandonment, and neglect coming from the colonists which worked in the road or arrived through it. The history of the road, however, is above all a history of conflict and contestation which lays bare the gap between discourses of the state and the everyday practices of state-making. The road's constant deterioration due to rain, the Indians' dragging of wood, the ceaseless bureaucratic delays and fiscal constraints, the continued indifference of the central government, and the harsh disputes between Capuchin friars and their adversaries constitute some of the events described which expose this gap. The most crucial aspect of this history, however, is not the prevalence of conflict and dispute, but how the rhetoric of civilisation versus savagery sustaining the project of the state and concealing its violence, was maintained. Precisely in this persistence, the *inclusive-exclusive* relation between frontier and state reveals the work of hegemony.

The second dimension of this relation concerns the everyday life of the frontier and the ways in which frontier peoples make sense of and challenge its inevitability. This dimension was addressed by exploring and following a series of practices and processes related to the current road and the ongoing road project. As I tried to show through the history and ethnography of the *Trampoline of death*, this relationship was best expressed in the image of this road as a space which speaks simultaneously of inclusion and exclusion. The former relates to the very meaning of roads as infrastructures that provide or allow movement, access to markets, connection, integration and, at a more abstract level, evoke "progress", "modernity", and "development". This is particularly the case of frontier regions, where there is usually no such thing as "roads" but "one road" –and often none- connecting a large

territory with the rest of the country. When such road becomes synonymous with death, tragedy, isolation or absence of the state, like the *Trampoline*, the sense of inclusion turns into one of exclusion. Nevertheless, the intricate history and geography of the road, together with the images so pervasively present in this history and geography (death, confinement, neglect, abandonment), revealed not as an expression of exclusion of the frontier from the state but, again, of the way in which the frontier was imagined and included in the narrative and project of the state.

This relation of *inclusive exclusion* was further discussed in the context of the road project's legibility practices and Guaduales' resettlement process. Although I drew attention to some of the instances in which this relationship was evidenced, I focused primarily on the different practices through which it was subverted, reproduced, defied, and negotiated. As it was argued, these practices, like the acts of making sense of the *Trampoline*, have a fundamental significance for the understanding of the relationship between frontier and state in two different yet related ways. Firstly, because they plainly showed that the frontier is not a mere discursive projection of the state, nor frontier peoples are passive recipients of power or –contrarily- stateless subjects evading or resisting power. Rather, they exposed the multiple interactions and entanglements through which the boundaries between state and frontier, state and community, norm and practice, and so on, are daily transgressed and reconfigured. Secondly, and no less important, because they evidenced that the frontier does not comprise a homogeneous geographical region or territory but rather a highly uneven and often conflicting space or, in a more extended sense, a *condition* embodying this relationship of *inclusive exclusion*, regardless of the ways (geographical, historical, social, political) in which this relationship is encountered or called into question.

There are several instances linked to the road that were described in detail throughout the text, and in different ways reveal this condition of frontier: Codazzi and Reyes' narratives and cartographical constructions of the Putumayo, the road's solemn inauguration rituals, the Capuchins' cadastral plans exhibiting the violent dispossession of indigenous lands in the Sibundoy Valley, the language through which the ceaseless struggles and conflicts involved in the construction of the road were expressed, the *Trampoline's* precipitous

geography and long record of deadly accidents, and the representations of the peasant and the displaced in the context of the road project, just to name a few. Beyond the history and geography of the road, there are many other everyday examples that also illustrate or epitomise this condition. For instance, the sporadic practice, often carried out by authorities themselves, of "exporting" or sending homeless or "marginal" persons from major cities to smaller ones or peripheral towns; the routine ID checks in bus terminals and airports in frontier regions aimed at searching for people's criminal records, a practice which brings to mind and reinforces the old image of such regions as prisons or places of exile; or the government's persistent habit of stigmatising the inhabitants of frontier regions as guerrilleros or delinquents, especially when it comes to social protests.

Along with these daily or habitual practices, there are others of circumstantial character where the condition of frontier is exposed. A good example of the latter is provided by the so-called "false positives scandal", that referred to a practice by the military that became widespread during the government of Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010), and which consisted of murdering civilians and presenting them as guerrilleros killed in combat. The scandal exploded at the end of 2008, when 19 young men from peripheral areas of Bogotá who had been reported lost by their families were found dead and buried as "N.Ns" (unknown) about 700 kilometres away, in the northern department of Santander.[34] The youths, as it was later established, had been tricked by a "recruiter" who offered them jobs and then delivered them to army forces who subsequently murdered them and falsely reported them as casualties. The public outcry that resulted from this case was followed by many similar claims across the country, which revealed the prevalence of this practice.

Although the different reports which followed the 2008 scandal noted that this type of extrajudicial executions was not new, they emphasised the massive increase of cases during Uribe's two presidential terms.[35] For instance, according to figures from the CCEEU Human

[34] "Falsos positivos mortales", Revista Semana, September 27, 2008, accessed August 10, 2013, http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/falsos-positivos-mortales/95607-3

[35] See, among others: FIDH, "The war is measured in litres of blood. False positives, crimes against humanity: those most responsible enjoy impunity", accessed August 10, 2013, http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapp_colombie__juin_2012_anglais_def.pdf; CCEEU, "Ejecuciones

Rights Observatory,[36] between 1994 and 2001 the number of extrajudicial executions by the state's security forces amounted to 739, while in the period from 2002 to 2010 that number increased to 3,512.[37] This rise has been widely associated with Uribe's counterinsurgency campaign, which put pressure on the military to show results and also devised a system that gave rewards and incentives to army units and commanders producing more casualties. The systematic character of the killings was revealed and often stressed in the reports in relation to the profiles of the victims and the *modus operandi* of the killings. The former were mostly young men that would easily fit the profile of combatants, generally from low-income families living in rural areas or zones affected by the conflict, although indigents, homeless, displaced, disabled, and other individuals regarded as "marginal" were also common victims.

The *modus operandi*, as summarised in one of the reports,[38] was the following: in some cases, the victims were detained arbitrarily and without judicial warrant in the place where they lived or worked, whilst in others they were previously selected by a paid "recruiter" or "informant" who tricked them with a job offer or another false promise. Once detained or recruited, the victim or victims were transported (often long distances so they could not be identified by local witnesses) and delivered to a military unit who executed them; in most cases, the executions took place in remote rural areas where counterinsurgency operations were taking place. Following the execution, the crime scene was manipulated to simulate a combat: the victim was stripped from his clothes and IDs, dressed in military uniforms and fitted with weapons; subsequently, pictures of the scene were taken by the same executioners as evidence of the "combat" (pictures which often revealed the crude simulation of the crime scene in details such as victims wearing boots in the wrong feet or

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extrajudiciales en Colombia 2002-2010. Crímenes de lesa humanidad bajo el mandato de la política de defensa y seguridad democrática", Documentos temáticos no.12, (Bogotá: Códice, 2012); CINEP, *Deuda con la humanidad II. 23 años de falsos positivos (1988-2011)*, CIPEP-PPP (Bogotá: Códice, 2011); UN-Human Rights Council, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Philip Alston", A/HRC/14/24/Add.2, accessed August 20, 2013, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/14session/A.HRC.14.24.Add.2_en.pdf

[36] CCEEU (Coordination Colombia-Europe-United States) is a network of human rights organisations in Colombia. See http://coeuropa.org.co

[37] CCEEU, 2012, "Ejecuciones extrajudiciales", 8.

[38] FIDH, 2012, "The war is measured in litres of blood", 19-20.

clothes too big). The victim was then buried as "NN" and then reported as a casualty to the respective military command or battalion. Finally, the commander and soldiers of the military unit responsible for the casualty or casualties were rewarded with either leave, economic compensations or congratulations.

To quote an example of a "false positive", I will reproduce a case included in another report presenting a chronological sample of 951 such cases built on complaints between 1984 and 2011. The case, listed as Case no. 0819, took place on January 20th 2008 in Puerto Asís (Putumayo) and reads as follows:

> In Puerto Asís, Putumayo, troops from the Mobile Brigade 13 executed the peasant leaders Hugo Armando Torres and Heynar Alexander Guerrero Paredes, in events which took place in the vereda Nueva Unión, settlement of Teteyé. According to the complaint: "the peasants were executed in an extrajudicial way, when members of the Brigade XIII burst into the home of Hugo Armando Torres and detained him arbitrarily. The soldiers asked the inhabitants for the leader and despite them identifying him as a leader from the community, one of the soldiers accused him of being a "sapo guerrillero" (snitch). Minutes later, the military took Hugo Armando to the outskirts of the settlement and half an hour later, approximately, rifle shots and two explosions were heard. Subsequently, a military helicopter circled overhead and fired indiscriminately over the families inhabiting the place. Hours later, two more helicopters flew over. One of them landed nearby the house of Heynar Alexander Guerrero, his house was broken into, and since that moment no news was heard of the young man. On the following day the lifeless bodies of Hugo Armando Torres and Heynar Alexander Guerrero were found in the Puerto Asís morgue. The corpses, showing signs of torture, were buried in the cemetery as NN in the same crypt and without coffin. The death of the two community leaders was reported as the result of an armed combat with guerrilleros from the Front 48 of the FARC….".[39]

The scandal and intense debate unleashed by the "false positives" can be explained by the fact that they constituted a form of violence against civilians which, different to other conflict-related violations (forced displacement and disappearance, massacres, kidnapping), suggested the direct involvement and responsibility of the state's military forces. The way in which this involvement has been usually exposed and denounced by human rights and media reports on the subject, is by placing heavy emphasis on the systematic and widespread character of the executions, together with the impunity and cover-up surrounding most of such crimes. This emphasis has been critical in making visible

[39] CINEP, 2011, *Deuda con la humanidad*, 180-181.

the magnitude of the phenomenon, and in order to acknowledge it as a crime against humanity which could eventually lead to the intervention of the International Criminal Court. Much less emphasis has been placed, however, on the question of what made the victims of "false positives" expendable or, alternatively, what rendered these extrajudicial executions such a natural or spontaneous response to the pressure on the military to "show results". This is a question that is seldom asked because it seems redundant or self-evident, because in the country's long-history of conflict, the status of potential victim of "false positives", displacement, disappearance, etc., has in most cases been defined not by the person's involvement in the conflict, but by his pre-existent (or assumed) condition of "marginal", "excluded", "vulnerable", or any other similar adjective. Put differently, this condition -to quote Agamben's statement on the character of sovereign violence- is what allows "*to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice*".[40] This constitutes another kind of violence, the violence we find exhibited in the country's amputated map and hegemonic state narrative and which strongly evokes the condition of frontier in the sense that it reflects not so much an expression of exclusion from the state, as a particular form of inclusion to it.

In discussing the genesis of state power, Bourdieu states that "the most brutal relations of force are always simultaneously symbolic relations".[41] The reason for this, he argues, is that symbolic relations are extremely difficult to break or alter since they are rooted in cognitive structures, structures through which the social world is constructed. The state, moreover, plays a central role in shaping such structures for it "establishes and inculcates common forms and categories of perception and appreciation, social frameworks of perception, of understanding or of memory, in short *state forms of classification*".[42]

The relationship of *inclusive exclusion* between frontier and state explains the condition of possibility for these relations. This relationship, as it was emphasised throughout the text, has historically been shaped by everyday situations of conflict and contestation. To account

[40] Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 83 (emphasis in original).
[41] Bourdieu, "Rethinking the state", 12.
[42] Bourdieu, "Rethinking the state", 13 (emphasis in original).

for these situations, as I tried to show through the different practices associated with the road, is fundamental in order to apprehend the world as it is lived rather than merely thought or discursively constructed. Yet, the most significant aspect of this relationship, what makes it brutal is, I think, its continuity in time and space. This is so because through this continuity the violence this relationship embodies becomes normalised, even to the point that we come to see it as an immanent or natural condition of the frontier. To confront this violence, then, it is not enough to condemn or denounce its visible manifestations and effects. This task also, and fundamentally, requires us to permanently question and expose the symbolic or invisible boundaries in which the violence of the state is grounded, reproduced, and perpetuated. Only in this way can the condition of frontier be overcome.

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